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"Loyal je serai durant ma vie."

THREE VOLUMES IN ONE, COMPLETE.

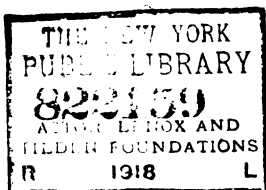


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ROY WEBB
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LOYAL.

CHAPTER I.

N a couch drawn to the window to catch the last rays of the setting sun, lay a woman with the stamp of death upon her face. She was not old, but on the fair white brow were lines of care and sorrow. The eyes, still bright, wandered over the placid summer landscape with an eager, restless longing, and the parched lips quivered with some suppressed feeling.

It had been a beautiful face once—a face that bore the unmistakable mark of high breeding—a face that had once been marred by the haughty curl of the lips, by the look of excessive pride on every one of the chiselled features; but those lines were all fading now as she lay dying—fading under the influence of some strong feeling.

She was the mistress of all the fair domain that she gazed upon; yet it was no sorrow for leaving it that filled her eyes with unshed tears. There was one she must leave behind—one who was more to her than life or lands—one she must leave unprotected among the thousand snares that would beset his gay young life, with none to care for him, to watch over him as she had done. Even now his merry laugh fell on her ear, as he passed outside, heedless of the bitter pain in his mother's heart.

She turned restlessly, and spoke with fretful impatience to a

man who stood near her, leaning against the dark oaken frame of the window, with his face in shadow.

"Why do you watch me so, Guy? It worries me to feel your eyes fixed upon me. Why do you not speak?"

"Was I watching you, mother dear?" he answered gently—and there was an infinite tenderness in the way in which he took the poor thin hand in his; "I was thinking of you, hoping you were a little better this evening."

"Hoping! there is no hope left. I am dying, and you know it, Guy. Why do you try to deceive me? There is none who will speak the truth to me if you will not."

The dark face that bent over her brightened just a little as she said that. Then she drew her hand away, and burying her face, she moaned out, "O God, to die and leave him, my own bright beautiful boy—to die and leave him alone! Who will love him as I have done?"

He left her to herself for a moment, then he spoke again.

"Mother dear, try to think that God knows best—and—can't you trust me just a little? Don't you think that I will care for my brother—not as you have done—no love can be as yours—but do you not believe that I will do my best? Leave your boy to me, mother; he is so much younger than I am. I will be as a father to him."

She looked up hastily.

"You, Guy? you who care for nothing but your pictures and your art—you who think such love as mine a pitiful weakness—you who are hard and cold and good, and have no pity for my boy's thoughtlessness and the heedless nature that brings him into trouble? You would soon forget your momentary pity, and be harsh with him. Ah, no; *you* would not take care of him."

Could she have seen the red flush that mounted to her elder son's forehead, and the quivering of his firm haughty mouth, even she had not been so cruelly hard on him, who loved her with a worshipping tender love, as only strong firm men can love weak frail women—a love utterly unappreciated and

passed over in her idolatry of the younger, who all his young life of nineteen years had caused her nothing but pain and anxiety.

How often during his life had Guy Lawrence suffered as he did now at his mother's careless cruelty.

He retreated farther into the shadow, and bit his lip to keep back the impatient words that might have pained her—and she went on: "How can I trust you? how can I feel you will have any pity or tenderness for him?—for, Guy, I have not been just or good to you; you have been a true son to me, and I have tried to love you as I ought—but, oh, Guy, forgive me, I have worshipped him, and thought too little of you."

He lifted up her hand and pressed it to his lips, and his voice was low and unsteady.

"I know it, mother—your love has not been for me: you call me cold and hard, you say I only care for my art. Did you never think that the reason I have lived so constantly abroad, and tried to find happiness in other things was because there was none for me at home? Don't think that I reproach you, dear, you could not help it; but I could not bear the pain of knowing and seeing every hour that your love was all for him."

As he spoke her breath came quick and fast, the tears welled into her eyes, and when she answered her voice was weak and broken.

"Forgive me. I have been a bad mother. All the love to one and so little to the other. Guy, Guy, listen to me once more—only once. Promise me to forgive all the wrong I have done you, and for my sake take him into your charge. You are good and strong. You have influence over him. When he would go wrong, guide him. When he is in danger, save him. You, who have so much, give him of your abundance. Let him never want for money. Can you do all this? If you could promise, swear to me that you will, I could die so peacefully—"

She clutched his hand with eager fingers. He knelt by her side.

"I will take charge of him. Trust him to me," he said solemnly; but she interrupted in a wild, excited voice.

"When we meet again," she gasped, "you will answer to me for him."

"Try to be quiet," said Guy. "If you wish it I will swear to you, mother, by my love for you, I will take charge of him. I will try to keep him from evil and danger. I will, if there be need, give my life for his."

He ceased speaking, and he was very pale—almost as colourless as the dying woman, who sank back exhausted; and in his voice and on his face was the solemnity of one who has just taken a great vow.

"I trust you—your life for his—your life for his," she murmured half incoherently.

And then there was silence, and Guy Lawrence thought, and realized the awful burden he had taken on himself.

Did he foresee all the sacrifices it would entail? Did he, knowing the wilful, unstable nature of the boy he had undertaken to cherish more than his life, foresee the shadow that would be cast on his own future? Ay, even while he made the vow, he counted the cost, and knew how great it would be; and as he knelt there in the summer twilight by the side of the dying woman there came over his face the look that might have been on the face of the Roman soldier, who, rather than leave his post without having received the word of command, stood there amidst the raging of the fire, "faithful unto death."

CHAPTER II.



UY LAWRENCE'S mother had married twice. He was the only child by her first marriage; his brother, Bertie Deverell, the only child by her second.

The first was a marriage of convenience with a man many

years older than herself, who had worshipped his young wife, and died saddened and half broken-hearted by her coldness and indifference. The second was a marriage of love, with a young handsome cousin who had been known to her long years before. He died soon after the birth of his child, and the widow in her passionate grief found no consolation but in her almost adoring love for this her youngest born.

Her infatuation seemed almost excusable, for Bertie Deverell was a handsome boy, with the winning manners and bright though unstable nature of his father.

But for Guy Lawrence, Lady Caroline had little or no love, though in the heart of the reserved, shy boy there was hidden a depth of love for his beautiful mother of which she had never dreamed. It was always pent up, always checked by her coldness—this love which never found words till he, a strong man of thirty, bent over the couch where she lay dying. The hand of death ever throws down the barriers that separate the living, and too late she knew the love she had wilfully ignored.

Too late—but not too late to trust him with her nearest and dearest. Too late—but not too late to bind him with a vow which should mar his whole life.

Just lately there had dawned across his life a light that made all things seem bright—that made the world seem very fair and full of hope.

Guy Lawrence was a man whom other men called cold and hard. A man with an inflexible will, which seemed powerful to bend all things to itself, and a reticent nature, which took the form of intense pride.

He was not by any means a saint. He was a man beloved and sought after by women; yet not one among them could accuse Guy Lawrence of treachery or dishonor. Some bitter knowledge that he had gained in his first youth had made him intensely distrustful of most women. None of the high-born damsels who had sought him, as much from pique at the coldness of his manner as from covetous desire of his wealth, had been able to warm him into life, but many among another

class, whose existence they would not recognize, but whose influence over men's lives is perhaps greater than their own, could tell of generous deeds, of kindness in time of need, of never hoped for sympathy, that they had received at Guy Lawrence's hands.

Bertie Deverell would have little or nothing but that which he would owe to the generosity of his elder brother; for the mother, Lady Caroline, brought no dower to her first husband, and her second was almost penniless; but Guy Lawrence was a rich man, and all the fair lands, the wide domains around Erlesmere, were in reality his own, though he had left his mother in possession of them until her death.

They were fair lands. Any man might have been proud of such a heritage. Miles away beyond the park gates stretched the forest of Erlesmere; in the summer time a sea of many-colored foliage. How the leaves rippled, how the silvery stems of the birches seemed to catch the sweet sunshine and toss it up to the grim pines, the solemn poplars.

Here was timber, too, that would if need be fetch a high price in the market. But a Lawrence must have been hardly pressed indeed to cut down those grand elms and stately beeches. There was meadow land slanting eastward from the forest; there was water gleaming white between the heavy-leaved trees. And the park was a picturesque type of the fair surrounding of many an ancestral mansion.

A broad drive swept round the front of the house, and twined for half a mile between green slopes to the park lodge. To the right and left of the drive undulated glossy sward, browned here and there by the gnarled roots of a clump of giant trees; and near the house, to the right of it, and somewhat in the background, lay a parterre of flowers, yclept the garden.

The house was a great irregular mass of gray building, turreted and gabled, of what particular architectural era difficult to determine, but as a whole the effect was grand. There was no veneer about its exterior. It was ancient enough to defy

even the modernization of plate-glass windows. But inside—nineteenth-century tastes—love of ease (and the wherewithal to gratify that love) had somewhat altered the character of the house. There was no severe stateliness, no gray grandeur, about the tessellated hall or the handsome velvet-carpeted staircase, both usually heavy with the scent of the flowers that filled the conservatories, swung in baskets from the ceilings, bloomed in jardinières or gilded vases, wherever such articles could be placed. There was refinement of art in the delicate tinting of the walls, the choice of every fitting in the rooms that had been last used by Lady Caroline Deverell. Pictures—gems that would make a dealer's eyes water—broke the monotony of lavender-toned paint, bijou mirrors filled up useless corners, every sort of lounge was scattered in boudoir and reception rooms.

Guy Lawrence sat in the library on the morning after his promise to his mother, thinking of all that had passed between them; thinking of something else also—of a fair, bright young face, of a merry, ringing voice, that he was beginning to care for more than for all the world besides; of a wild hope of winning them for his own; of at last finding one woman on whom to spend all the fierce love of his passionate, albeit controlled, nature.

As he thought, his heart beat thick and fast. He could not sit there any longer, on this bright summer morning. The warm, luxurious air seemed breathing of *her*, the radiant flowers seemed speaking of her, the beech trees waving in the distance were just the color of her bright chestnut hair, the very birds as they sang seemed calling him to her.

He rose and rang the bell, impatiently pacing the room until it was answered.

"Saddle St. Dunstan, and bring him round directly," he said to the servant.

"Please, sir, Mr. Bertie's got him out."

"Mr. Bertie! My horse?"

"Yes, sir. James told him as he thought you wouldn't

like it, sir ; but Mr. Bertie would have his way, and he's gone, sir, sure enough. I see him go across the home-park like mad."

Guy Lawrence had turned to the window, and the man could judge nothing of how his master took the news from the set of the firm, square shoulders, and the motionless figure—only the voice was very cold and quiet.

"Tell them to saddle Wild Rose, and bring her round instantly."

The man hesitated. "Yes, sir, and—perhaps you'd like to know, sir, whatever James could say contrary, Mr. Bertie would put the patent new bit on St. Dunstan; and James do say as he thinks it isn't safe, sir, Mr. Bertie being such a careless rider, and that 'ere horse so wild like."

There came no answer this time, and the man left the room.

Guy with his face still turned resolutely outwards, his eyes fixed on the distant scenery, yet seeing nothing, stood there till the chestnut mare was led past the window; and then he went out and rode away, bestowing scarcely a word in answer to the groom's excuses and explanations of "how it wasn't his fault."

Rode away at a swinging trot, which soon broke into a mad gallop, with a fierce anger in his heart and an evil light in his eyes.

Careless of where he went; letting the mare take him as she would; careless even of the intense heat, till at length he came to a lane, called in that part of the country "the Green Walk." It was a long, winding lane; so thickly shadowed by the trees on either side—whose branches met and entwined overhead—that even in the fiercest noonday heat the shade was dense and unbroken. So little was it now used—being a by-way, not a high-road—that the ground was green, and ferns and bright flowers sprang up under the horse's feet. It was a place in which to dream away a summer's day; one of those pastoral paradises that make you wonder how you could ever have enjoyed your morning's ride in Rotten Row. Guy loosened the

reins, lifted his hat, and threw back his head to catch the breeze that murmured through the trees. The dark shadow went from his face, his compressed lips relaxed, his eyes softened as he felt the influence of the scene. He almost groaned to himself as he thought, "Who am I, that I should promise to take charge of that boy—I, who am so mad with passion at his first wild escapade?" And then he thought how absurdly he had over-valued this horse of his, his companion, the object of his care, during so many cold sorrowful years, when he had had so little else to love. He remembered remorsefully that though he had fully realized the danger both to horse and rider when he heard that St. Dunstan had been taken out with the new bit—one that had only been bought to try as an experiment on a hard-mouthed, unmanageable horse—he had thought more of the horse's danger than of his brother's. Bitterly enough he said to himself, "Who am I that I should be my brother's keeper?"

A turn in the lane dispelled all these thoughts. Coming towards him slowly, with loosened reins, rode Bertie on St. Dunstan—and not alone. For by his side rode a girl, her bright head close to his, her merry voice ringing with his on the summer air.

What a pretty picture she made in Guy Lawrence's eyes as she rode towards him, with the trees forming an arch over her head; one or two stray sunbeams making bright glints of light on her chestnut hair, the beautiful moulding of her young figure so clearly revealed by her close-fitting blue habit. Such a bright laughing face she lifted to his. Large saucy brown eyes, several shades darker than her hair; delicate *mignonne* features; and a wondrously fair skin, that had been rather too much tanned by constant exposure to sun and wind. People, the envious and the fault-finding, were wont to say that Kitty lived on horseback; was always out somewhere, plucking the roses of life, ignoring its cares, and forgetful of her share of its duties and troubles.

But they were hard upon her. She was only a bright,

merry girl, with an infinite belief in the "niceness" of the world, and an unbounded power of enjoying its pleasures. A girl with a good, true, strong heart; a passionate, ungoverned temper; and a wonderfully fascinating manner. She had a way of looking straight into your face with innocent, wide-opened eyes; and a little tender way of lowering her voice, that women called dangerous, but men found charming. A little coquette with a wilful, imperious manner—which sometimes softened into winning tenderness—and a loving woman's heart beneath all her careless gayety. There was one accomplishment in which Kitty excelled. She carried the science of flirtation to perfection. It was flirtation *pur et simple*, with no thought of what was to come after. Simply *pour s'amuser*; these long bright summer days, what would she do without some one to amuse her?

Bertie Deverell and she were almost like brother and sister, they had been so much together since their earliest childhood; but she was going far to make his heart beat high with something more than brother's love, as she rode with him day after day under the shade of the trees.

The warm flush deepened on Kitty Lorton's cheek when she caught sight of Guy Lawrence; and when he came up her little hand rested in his just a moment longer than was absolutely necessary. His low, *trainante* voice, as he answered the greeting in her eyes, sounded like music in her ears. Hitherto she had refused to hear the voice of the charmer, charmed he never so wisely; directly he charmed seriously it was all up with him. Flirtation was all very well; love up to a certain point permissible; but marriage, bah! Marriage meant ordering the dinners, scolding the servants, not having money to pay the bills, and above all, it meant loss of liberty. She would marry perhaps when it was absolutely necessary, when she was quite old and she must choose between marrying and being an old maid—she couldn't stand that. Fancy Kitty Lorton, with thin, peaked features, a shrill voice, and a tubby cat! Better anything than that. And somehow all these, her

ideas on matrimonial subjects, had changed since Guy Lawrence had come from abroad and she had renewed her acquaintance with him. There was a wonderful charm in the sun-browned, handsome face and kind, courteous manner, that made all things seem different to her.

Kitty watched him doubtfully, as letting go her hand, he turned to his brother with a face that darkened perceptibly.

"Bertie, you know that it is my wish that no one should ride St. Dunstan but myself. Any other horse you can have, but that one is mine, and mine alone—you understand?"

The boy's face flushed at the imperious tone, but he laughed carelessly.

"Don't look quite as black as that, old fellow. Mephistopheles himself would have the grace to hide his true character in the presence of the charming Marguerite. Kitty will be frightened of you, and St. Dunstan himself must be my excuse. He's a dev'lish good horse, with just a spice of his master's temper, but that must be excused—in a horse."

"Hush, Bertie. You'd no right to take St. Dunstan, less right still to speak so. If I were Mr. Lawrence, I'd not trust you on him; your hand is too heavy. See! you are fretting him even now."

Poor Guy could scarcely bear to watch how the horse fretted and chafed beneath the boy's impatient hand.

"I have said my say," he answered coldly. "Pardon me, Kitty, for speaking about it in your presence, but I would rather shoot the horse than have his temper spoilt by bad riding."

"Bad riding!" shouted Bertie, thoroughly provoked. "Confound you, Guy; you may beat me at book learning and canvas spoiling, but I'll back myself against you or any other fellow across country. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, to kick up such an infernal row about a stupid horse."

Kitty laughed.

"'Could some fay the giftie gie us—' Oh, Bertie, you don't know how savage you look! And can you imagine

Guy—Mr. Lawrence—making ‘a row?’ Why, it was yourself, you stupid boy. Of course he’s vexed with you, and of course you’re very sorry, and are not going to do it never no more.”

Both faces brightened under her sunny smile.

“Well, I never supposed he’d care so much. I never thought there was any harm when I took the brute,” grumbled Bertie.

“You never do think there’s any harm, do you, Bertie?”

“Kitty, let me tell you lecturing does not come well from your pretty lips—they were meant for better things. We’ve grown ever so stupid since Guy came. Who’s game for a race? St. Dunstan’s impatient; I want to give him a breather, and there’s such a nice little bit of fence just yonder. Come, Guy, I’ll show you how well I can take him over.”

“No, no; it’s nicer here in this delightful shade, and safer too, Bertie. It’s not a day for hard riding—only for luxurious idling under these wonderful trees.”

“Then good-by, Kitty; if you will not come with me, I must e’en go alone;” and with a merry nod he gathered up the reins for a start. Guy sprang forward and laid his hand on St. Dunstan’s neck.

“Stay, Bertie; believe that I do not speak for the horse’s sake, but for yours. Don’t try that place. I won’t answer for what may happen if you do.”

Truly it seemed as if Guy was right in distrusting his favorite’s temper just then. He stood there chafing at the delay, every vein showing clearly in his arched neck, his nostrils distended and quivering, and a dangerous light in his eye.

Bertie Deverell laughed defiantly and shook off the hand that would detain him—

“The part of Mentor just suits you, *Monsieur mon frère*, but I always make a point of not listening to good advice. Adieu! and au revoir, sweet Kitty,” and waving his hand, with a merry laugh and a mocking backward glance at his brother, he rode away.

For a moment Guy watched the well-knit figure, set firmly and easily in the saddle, sunlight falling on the golden curls and back-turned boyish face, and then, as the horse bore his brother swiftly away, his eyes softened, his features relaxed, and the anxious look faded out of his face. In its place there came one of passionate admiration as he looked down and met beautiful Kitty's consoling eyes.

He was seldom alone with her, and it was little wonder that, as they sauntered slowly through the breezy avenue, their horses' heads close together, his eyes taking in every line of the lovely face and graceful, lissome figure, he should yield himself up to the fascination of her beauty, and, forgetful of all else, feel only that he was alone with her. She had never seemed to him so marvellously attractive, he had never so fully realized until now how utterly this love had become part of his life—to make or to mar it. Do what he would he could not keep the fierce, passionate look out of his eyes. Even Kitty, who generally appeared so innocently unconscious of admiring glances, flushed with a momentary consciousness. She spoke to break the pause which had followed their last words.

"You love this horse very dearly—better than anything else in the world, don't you?"

Kitty was herself again—disdainful of the conscious shyness that had oppressed her for a moment. A coquette always, she never let a chance of flirtation slip. It would be a shame to miss such an opportunity as a ride *à deux*, with the chance of achieving a conquest over the hitherto unconquerable Guy Lawrence.

"I love him dearly; he was my only friend for years. You will laugh at me for indulging in sentiment, and think I am going to concoct a romance to cheat you out of the sympathy you ought to bestow on the heroes of your three-volumed novels. You wouldn't believe me, would you, Miss Lorton, if I attributed to myself any very deep and romantic attachment for—my horse?"

"For your horse, perhaps," answered Kitty, her thoughts

still bent flirtationwards. "I sometimes think, Mr. Lawrence, if you had a sister or—or a wife, you would hold her 'something better than your dog,' but *not* 'a little dearer than your horse.'"

He turned aside this innocent little shaft with a smile which Kitty thought meant contempt for her small coquetries, but which was only dreamy. For it was in this man's nature to love, and he was realizing intensely all the influences of time, place, and this girl's presence—so realizing it that it seemed impossible to speak and keep back the words that rushed to his lips.

"Don't you believe then," he began, in a voice low and quivering with suppressed feeling, "in a love which would hold the world well lost for one dear sake; a love which would believe all things, endure all things, would feel that life itself was well bartered for one look, one word? Just now, as we rode along under the trees, I was thinking of that far-famed ride of Launcelot's and Guinevere's, when, as day by day they rode along together, he, gazing on her loveliness, drinking in her beauty, could not choose but yield to her fascination, and in the potency of the spell forgot everything—honor, truth, a trust betrayed—even the guiltiness of his love, and this his only excuse:—

" 'A man would give all other bliss,
And all his worldly wealth for this:
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips.' "

He stooped his head lower and lower, carried away by the excitement that was beyond his control. He took her hand in his—the little, trembling, half-reluctant hand. Her eyelids drooped, and she quivered beneath his fierce gaze.

"Kitty—" he began again, hoarsely; and then she raised her eyes, her beautiful eyes, and lifted her head. One moment more and the full rosy lips close to his own would have met his in silent acknowledgment, the heart that beat so strangely

and wildly with newly awakened feeling would have rested against his—when a wild cry rang through the clear summer air, and they started apart with a sudden awakening to the outer world. The girl's face blanched with an overwhelming terror, but it was scarcely whiter than Guy's, for as the cry fell on his ear, he felt what had happened. Without a word he spurred his mare in the direction from which it had come, and in a few moments reached the scene of the catastrophe.

Near a broken fence, splinters of wood scattered on the road, stood St. Dunstan, quivering in every limb, with blood trickling from two deep gashes on his forelegs, and from a jagged wound in his chest, where a stake from the fence had penetrated. By his side, covered with dust, half stunned by the fall, stood Bertie Deverell, with sullen, downcast face and trembling lips.

Those two who saw Guy Lawrence's face never forgot the look of blind fury which for a moment convulsed it, transfiguring every feature, as he realized the ruin which had been wrought. For a minute there was silence; then he spoke, but his voice was hoarse and broken.

"Go away, and leave me."

Bertie moved slowly away through the gap in the fence and hid himself out of sight, throwing himself on the ground and burying his face in the long grass. Kitty, frightened and distressed, stooped and gathered up the reins of the chestnut mare, which Guy had left to her own devices, and led her away to tie her to a tree. Then she came slowly back, and drew up her own horse close to where Guy stood, and looked down on him sorrowfully, with a pitiful yearning in her face and tears in her great eyes. She was half afraid to speak, for he stood there without moving, his face hidden on St. Dunstan's glossy neck. The silence was so terrible that at last she could bear it no longer, so she stooped and laid her hand on his shoulder—

"Mr. Lawrence; Guy—please, please don't grieve so. Won't you speak to me? Mayn't I try to comfort you?" And then she sobbed outright.

He lifted his head—his face looked worn and haggard, and there was a miserable hopelessness in the heavy eyes that was not all sorrow for the horse.

“Don’t cry, Kitty,” he said, lifting his eyes to the fair face that had lately been so near his own; “unless you cry for St. Dunstan. I’m not worth such tears as yours. Where is Bertie? I can’t speak to him just for the present. Will you go to him and ask him if he will see you home?” He can have the mare; I must lead St. Dunstan.”

He took her hand and pressed it to his lips—a spark of light came into his face—then he dropped it, and taking up the reins, lifted his hat and turned homewards.

Kitty remained there watching till the last outline of man and horse disappeared in the distance, and then she turned with a heavy sigh and went to look for Bertie.

Two hours later Guy Lawrence looking from his window saw his brother coming slowly across the home-park on foot, and he turned and went down to the terrace to meet him. There was a half-frightened, half-sullen look on the boy’s face, and in the very manner in which he walked slowly and reluctantly homewards. He could not avoid meeting Guy, but he was passing him with averted eyes and hurried steps. Guy laid his hand on his arm.

“Bertie—” he began, and then he stopped.

“Oh, Guy, Guy, I didn’t mean—indeed I couldn’t help it.”

“Stop, Bertie, I was going to say if I was angry you must forgive me. I had cause enough, you know, but I had no right to be harsh. If I said anything you must try and forget it.”

The younger brother looked up surprised. He little knew the cause of all this: how, walking home from the scene of the accident, Guy had thought of his vow; remembered how he had promised never to be harsh to the boy, how he had meant to try and win his confidence, and use his influence over him; and confessed to himself sadly enough that he had begun badly.

"Guy—I never thought—" stammered Bertie. "Oh, Guy, how is St. Dunstan?"

"Dead."

"Dead?" He looked eagerly, but the grave face before him never changed. "How? When?"

"I shot him. Did you think I would let him live like that?" And Guy Lawrence turned and leant against one of the columns of the portico, and hid his face from his brother, scarcely heeding the torrent of words, half of excuse, half of sorrow, till there came a pause, and then he lifted his head.

"If indeed, Bertie, you do think you owe me some amends, if you would do something for my sake, there is but one thing I would wish or ask of you. No," he said, kindly, laying his hand on his brother's shoulder, as Bertie would have interrupted him with eager protestations, "it is not for myself. Bertie, you know—no you do not, cannot know—how much your mother loves you. Do you ever think how much pleasure you could give her by a little sacrifice of your own enjoyments? One hour that you spend by her bedside does her more good than all the medicine in the world. Will you try to be a little more with her? You are young and know so little of death. You do not know how bitterly you may reproach yourself when it is too late."

The boy's face saddened at the earnest tone.

"I will go now, Guy," he said, quietly. "Poor *Madre*, she does love me." And he turned and went into the house.

But the other remained, and gazing into the twilight of the summer evening, with sad, weariful eyes, realized in his heart that he had already paid part of the cost in coin that his heart held dear.

That night at midnight there was a cry raised, and the Angel of Death spread his dark shadow over the house, and over the chamber where the sick woman lay.

The brothers were there, summoned in haste; Bertie sobbing convulsively, with his face hidden in the bed-clothes; Guy with gentle, womanly care, supporting the frail attenuated

figure of the dying woman, his face set and white and a world of sorrow in his deep watchful eyes. The feeble hand wandered restlessly over the clothes. Guy gently took it in his, and knowing what it sought laid it on the boy's golden curls.

The breath came in quick, short gasps, with hurried words unintelligible to the anxious listeners; and then the glazing eyes closed, but opening once again fixed themselves first on Guy, then turning from him they sought the other son, better loved even to the end. And the words came out gaspingly—

“Your promise, Guy. My boy—your life for his—your—”

And then she died; and Guy laid the world-weary head gently down, and rushed from the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE morning after the funeral the two brothers were together in the library of Erlesmere. It was a fine old-fashioned room. As eloquent of wealth and taste as were the other rooms in the house, it had about it that atmosphere in which they were wanting. True, rich red curtains shrouded the wide window, and some massive bronzes stood out in artistic relief upon the gray marble of the mantelpiece; but here were no luxurious sofas, no sleep-inviting lounges sweet to sybarite eyes. Quaint oaken chairs, straight-backed and formal, stood in the few niches that were not filled by bookcases. Bookcases everywhere, and books—not book-covers, if you please, bought up at auctions to supply empty shelves—but such books as are meat and drink to those few in this noisy, hurrying world, to whom life is knowledge—books that stood in tempting rows before one pair of earnest eyes ever eager to devour their contents until this day.

But on this day, though Guy sat at the table with many papers scattered around him, his eyes were full of thoughts that

wandered far away, and his head rested dreamily on his hand. A softening light came now and then into those deep gray eyes, and that grave mouth, so hidden by the heavy drooping mustache and crisp bronze beard, moved with a half-smile as the brightness of a new hope dispersed for a moment the clouds of anxious forethought—a hope that had become almost a certainty on that day of St. Dunstan's death—a hope that broke with dazzling light over the life that had so lacked completeness—this hope a woman's love; not only a woman's love—other women had loved Guy Lawrence—but the love of the one woman whom he desired above all else in the world.

Bertie lounged on the low seat formed by the window-sill, pulling the long silky ears of a Skye terrier, with lazy weariness depicted in every limb and on his handsome young face.

Looking from one to the other you could not fail to note the marked difference in these two who were the children of one mother. In spite of the strong similarity of form and feature—the same height, the same broad shoulders and well-cut features in each—in their individuality they could scarcely be more dissimilar. Bertie, with his bright smile and winning, soft blue eyes, was far the handsomer of the two; but Guy, with his quiet, grave manners and firm mouth, gave the impression of strength—strength moral and physical—for good or evil.

And the small world round Erlesmere, which knew little, but busied itself much about the concerns of the Squire, as is usual with worlds great or small, believed the worst, and gave Guy Lawrence credit for much of the evil and little of the good. It was enough for these small village folk that he had been away so long in "furrin parts." Guy was disliked as a stranger and an alien amongst them, and Bertie was first favorite in every heart. Not quite in every heart, though. There was one young girl who had been brought in close contact with him all her young life—who loved him dearly—thought she loved him better than any, until one pair of dark passionate eyes looking into hers taught her how to love under the trees that summer morning.

Guy broke the silence, speaking abruptly. "Bertie, you know that mother has left me your sole guardian?"

"Little enough to be guardian of," answered Bertie. "I'm not speaking of myself—only of the property, this valuable property that I can call mine. How much is it—two thou? Better hand it over, old fellow, and let me put the pot on Lady Betsy for the Leger!"

"Bertie, don't speak as if you would; even in the smallest thing, blame her. Poor mother! you know she left you all the money she had the control of—every farthing. All that was hers is yours—the estate and all the money she possessed in her lifetime, was my father's, and is mine now, and all that is mine is yours; you don't need that I should tell you that; you don't think that of all this money, for which I care so little, I should grudge you your share?—you, my mother's favourite boy."

Guy's voice shook, and Bertie started up.

"Hush, Guy! I'm not such a ruffian as to think you any thing but what you are—the best of good fellows—or to blame her. But it is hard lines to be brought up like this—more like a prince than a pauper, and then to be told when you want to make a start in life that you are the happy possessor of a paltry sum—not enough to keep you in cigarettes and lavender kids, by Jove! It's no good mincing the matter, my real income is—nothing a year. I cannot dig: I'm not ashamed to beg, but it wouldn't pay, so I must either starve or be dependent on you. I don't know which I prefer."

He shook the dog off his knees, and sent it away with an angry kick, as he raised himself from his lounging attitude. Guy had risen too, and was pacing up and down the room with his arms crossed, a way that he had when he was vexed. He stopped opposite his brother, and looked at him.

"You don't know which you prefer? When I asked you to share with me all that I had, did I make the request seem so like charity that you must take offence at it? We have had enough of this, Bertie. No need to think who the money be-

longs to so long as we both have enough. When you go back to college you will receive your usual allowance. When you come of age, two years hence, you will choose what profession you please, and do in all things as you would if your mother had lived. It wasn't that I meant when I spoke of being your guardian. She not only left me your sole guardian legally, but she left you to my care as the dearest treasure she had to leave."

Guy paused, but the kindness, even tenderness of his tone, awakened no response.

"Much good may the treasure do you," Bertie answered, with a half laugh. "I advise you to abandon all grand notions of taking care of me. I shall go to the bad my own way, and a dev'lish good way it will be. I had but one idea, of turning over a new leaf, living a sober, honest sort of life, but that idea has been knocked on the head."

He threw himself back on his low seat, and taking an embroidered case from his pocket twirled a cigarette between his lazy, white fingers. Guy came near him eagerly.

"What was that one idea? Was it anything I can help you in? There is nothing, nothing in the whole world I would not do, would not give up to help you for your mother's sake. Speak, Bertie; it will be hard indeed if I can't help you."

The earnestness of his tone arrested his brother's attention.

"It's no good telling you now, Guy, and then—you'd only laugh at me—say I was too young, and it was all boyish folly; and besides, what's the good of talking. A fellow can't live, much less marry, on—how much is it a year?"

"Marry!"

The tone and all the amazement it expressed roused all Bertie's slumbering impatience.

"Yes, marry," he answered, angrily; "and why the deuce shouldn't I marry as much as you or any other fellow? I'm of age in less than two years. You can't act the part of stern parent and forbid the banns then. I'd marry her, and not ask your consent or any one else's, if I wasn't a beggar, or worse—a pauper, subsisting on your charity."

Bertie sank back on his low seat. Argument was not his strong point.

Guy passed over the injustice of his last words. A terrible fear possessed him that his young brother had got into an entanglement with some pretty dairymaid with rosy cheeks, one of the tenant's daughters: or worse still, with one of the second-rate actresses at the little provincial theatre. He scarcely dared ask for fear the doubt should become a certainty.

"Who is it?" he said at length. "It seems ridiculous to talk of marriage and you in the same breath; but an engagement might keep you steady, might be a good thing, if—Bertie, is it any one I could approve of?"

"Approve of! *Juste ciel!* What are we that we should aspire to so great and unmerited a blessing as your approbation or vice versâ. Who are you that we should need to ask it? You remind me," he drawled, holding his cigarette daintily in the air, and looking at it with half-closed eyes, "of the fellow in the play who does the old uncle and that sort of thing, you know, folds his hands over everybody's heads and gives everybody his blessing. I always thought that was a mistake. If I had a rich uncle I'd say, 'Hand over the tin, old chap, and keep the blessing for yourself; you may want it.'"

Guy shook himself impatiently.

"Is this a time to make a fool of yourself? Who is she?"

"Who is she? That's what the old French party—what's his name?—used to ask when he heard any one had come to grief, 'Who is she?' What was that fellow's name, by the bye? There were such a number of French chaps who were always saying witty things. I never can remember all their names—was it Rochefoucauld? Who is she? Why, she's the person who loves me, and I'm the person who love her."

Guy turned away impatiently.

"I told you I would help you if I could, but I'm not going to waste my time listening to your nonsense. If you can't speak sense we'll let the thing alone."

"Good Heavens! Guy, how unreasonable you are; how

can you expect me to talk sense? Don't you see the whole thing is nonsense—that is, nonsense to you. You'd call it ridiculous of me to love her, ridiculous of me to want to marry her; but I do love her with all my heart and soul, and I do want to marry her—only I can't." In spite of his jesting manner the words sounded sincere, and his face flushed with a warmth he could not hide under all his affected indifference.

Guy laid his hand on his shoulder and looked earnestly into his face.

"If you only would be serious, Bertie; if I could only tell what you mean, God knows I would help you if I could."

The boy threw himself from his lounging attitude and looked up into his brother's grave face, and there was an eager expression in his eyes as he answered:

"Oh, Guy, would you help us? could you? I've no right to be too proud to take your help, and all my life hangs on it—my happiness—for I love her so much, you cannot tell how much; and I don't mean it for a threat, Guy, but I know I shall go to the bad if I lose her. It's only the thought of her that keeps me from other things—you know, things that the fellows at college think nothing of, but which she would despise me for."

There was a true ring in his voice that dispelled Guy's doubts, but still no thought of the fatal truth flashed through his mind; only, his own love taught him that the true love for a pure woman would be the saving of the boy, and there was double earnestness in the voice which answered.

"Tell me how I can help you. I will, if I can—no need to tell you that. Tell me who it is that you love, and how I can help you."

"Who it is I love? Why, surely, surely, Guy, you must know," he answered, with a little laugh, turning towards the window, half ashamed of owning his folly—half afraid of ridicule.

It was well he did so—well he did not see the sudden ghastly

pallor of his brother's face—the drawn, quivering lips, which would not frame the question they dared not ask.

"We have been so much together," Bertie went on. "There is no engagement; I have never asked her to be my wife, but I have thought of it since the day we first parted, when I went to college. I don't mean to be vain, but she knows I love her, and, I believe, I am sure that if I am ever rich enough to ask her to have me, she will. Oh, Guy, she is so beautiful—my beautiful Kitty!"

He knew it before—he was sure of it before the last word was spoken, the last unmistakable word—her name. That last word stunned him; he hardly knew or felt anything after that. He never moved from where he stood, resting against the marble mantelpiece with folded arms and fingers tightly clinched, but on his set, white face—white under the bronzing of many sultry suns—was the look of a man who had just received his death-blow. He did not need to speak. He could not trust his voice to utter one syllable, but he heard as a man lying half asleep, half awake, hears in his dreams all the rhapsodies on her beauty, all the extravagant professions of love for her—for *her* whom his heart held dearer than life itself.

At last Bertie paused, and then Guy spoke, but so low, so slowly, lest his voice should tremble, should sound as it did in his own ears, so far away, as if it was some one else, not he, Guy Lawrence, who was speaking, asking the question that should put the seal to his own death-warrant.

"Have you any reason to believe that she loves you?"

"Reason? Good Heavens! would you have me doubt her? She herself makes no secret of it. Look at the difference in her behavior to you and to me, for instance. She calls me Bertie, dear Bertie; she treats you with reserve and formality, as she would a stranger; but to me, doesn't she openly show her preference, doesn't she care to be with me, and say so? Oh, and in a thousand little ways I can tell she loves me, though it's hard to explain."

Guy looked up. The suddenness of the blow had for the

moment numbed both heart and mind, he could not think or feel acutely, but now one ray of hope brought him back to life. Hope—could he dare hope that his brother's argument was a false one—that the very things Bertie quoted were signs that she loved him only in an openly acknowledged sisterly sort of way, very different from the shy consciousness he felt she would show to one she really loved? Could he dare hope that his young brother's life—that life which he had vowed to guard and shield and make his chiefest care, should become waste for want of that love which should make his own so perfect? Could he take this happiness for himself and leave his brother without? For, after the first shock was passed, he, remembering all that had passed, could not deceive himself; he believed that should he choose he could win her for himself, that should he enter the lists in fair and open rivalry, his brother would have no chance against him. In this short time of intensest suffering he fully realized that if he gave her up it would be of his own free will; he remembered the look in her eyes, the flush on her cheeks when he had last looked down on her sweet, drooping face, and felt that his strength was all unequal to the trial—he could not do this thing and live—he could not make himself forever dishonored in the eyes of the girl he loved so dearly. He knew, and this was the last, worst pang of all, that should he leave her now, having said so much, looked so much, without saying more, without asking her to be his wife, she would hold him dishonorable and treacherous, she would despise and hate him as one who had won from her some show of preference only to laugh at her, to make light of her love and leave her.

If he could bear this pain himself, could he bear to make her suffer as he knew she would suffer? Not from slighted love. No, all the love she might have felt for him, all the love that he had hoped and trusted was growing up in her heart for him would be crushed out of her, but from wounded pride. Ah! how would she bear it—she, who was so sensitive to the smallest slight?

Surely it was not possible for a man to endure more than once in a lifetime such agony as Guy Lawrence endured in that short time.

He remembered ever after just how the sun cast shadows on the opposite wall, just how his brother's voice sounded in the still summer air; even the scent of many roses wafted through the open window would in after years bring that scene back to him with sickening intensity.

He looked at his young brother, bright with youth and new hopes, and tried to speak naturally; but in his voice was an echo of dull pain, that with all his care he could not smother, that would have aroused the attention of any one less self-engrossed.

"I will try to think of all this, Bertie. You must give me time. I will go for a stroll, and come back to you." And he turned to go.

If he could only get away—away from everybody and be alone, he might bear it, might be able to think, to ask himself whether it was in his power to make this sacrifice.

"Going away? Why, in the name of all that's wonderful, can't you think here, if there's anything to think about?" exclaimed Bertie, fretfully. "Confound it, Guy! I've been wasting my breath for the last half hour, and I believe you haven't even been listening. What's the good of your telling a fellow you can help him, and then going out for a stroll? By George, I'll give the whole thing up, or I'll do it without your assistance."

Guy turned back.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Do? Why, I've told you a dozen times. The whole thing's as plain as a pike-staff. Here am I, Bertie Deverell, a beggar. Do you think it's any good my trying to obtain that old ruffian's consent to my marriage with his daughter? I had given up all idea, all hope of it, but you chose to offer me your assistance—remember it was your own doing, and if you wish to get out of it you can—but if you meant anything

by such an offer and stick to it there is only one way of helping me. You must go to her governor and make things square about my prospects and expectations, and all the humbug those sort of people expect you to talk when you propose to their daughters. Satisfy him somehow ; you, the owner of Erlesmere, can easily do that—tell him that, thanks to your generosity, I may not be quite a beggar, and make him consent to the engagement till I'm of age."

"What have I to do with asking Captain Lorton's consent?" asked Guy.

"Simply this: unless you do, he'll not give it. I'm in love with Kitty—not with Kitty's father. *Entre nous*, he's a regular old cad, and I shan't be too proud of my father-in-law."

Bertie laughed—a confident, self-assured laugh, that nearly drove Guy mad—as he threw himself back and caressed the little golden mustache, that lay like a faint shadow on his upper lip.

"But you see Kitty isn't quite so much alive to her father's shortcomings as I am, and she might see things differently, and though I've little doubt she'd soon consent, yet it might go hard with her to make her marry without the old fellow's leave, so he must be humored for her sake. You must go, Guy ; he'll take all you say for gospel ; my words would have little weight. You are rich, I am poor—*voilà tout*."

Guy did not speak. Bertie looked at him with elevated eyebrows, and his face slightly flushed.

"It is evident you don't care about the office. Excuse me for taking you at your word. I was fool enough to suppose you meant it, when you said you would do what you could for me. I won't trouble you."

Guy came near him, and spoke in a low, constrained voice.

"Time enough to speak about troubling me when I think of it, Bertie. I have told you I want time to consider this ; it's not a thing to be undertaken lightly. Independently of other things, is it so easy for me to pledge myself for you ? Are you so fit to be trusted with this girl's happiness ?"

He turned and walked hurriedly up and down with folded arms.

"God knows I'm not fit to set myself up as any man's judge, but you are so young—can you depend on yourself? It is so hard—so hard," he muttered, between his closed teeth, "to trust her to you."

"Good heavens, Guy! it is too absurd to hear you talk as if you were her father. Leave the matter alone, and leave us alone. We shall manage well enough without you, no doubt. We can wait till something turns up."

Vague words, which Guy scarcely heard, for all his heart was rebelling against that one word "we," which seemed to take it for granted that she was his already. He answered slowly and painfully—

"I'll do my best for you, Bertie, now and always; but I will have time. Leave me now, and come to me again in an hour or two."

And Bertie turned away, carelessly humming a tune, and closing the door, left him alone. Alone with his bitter, miserable thoughts, and the fierce struggle going on in his heart. The wild, passionate love, the desire to gain her in spite of every obstacle battling against the memory of his vow, with the echo of the dead woman's voice ringing in his ears. He had vowed to give, should there be need, his very life for his brother; but not this—not this. This was more than his life—his love and his honor.

CHAPTER IV.

KITTY LORTON stood at her window disconsolate. It was more than a week since Lady Caroline's death; and she was wondering as she leant against the window-frame, gazing right away into the distance to

where a large, gray, castellated building glimmered faintly through the thickly overshadowing trees, when she should see Guy Lawrence again.

Bertie Deverell, her constant companion and quondam play-fellow, came in for but a small share of her thoughts; for she was thinking of that day under the trees—thinking of how Guy Lawrence looked and spoke, how she had in her heart almost acknowledged that she loved him, and of the strange abrupt ending to it all. And she had never seen him since. It was hard, very hard, that the only love episode in which she had ever taken any real interest should have been interrupted in so sad a manner.

She had loved Lady Caroline and grieved over her loss; but she was young, and even her grief, though it was very real, could not keep her from dwelling with a strange glad happiness that would not be quenched, on the remembrance of Guy Lawrence's half-spoken love.

She never doubted that he would come soon. She never doubted that he loved her; though it was her way to mock at most things, to disbelieve and make light of professions of love, the truth and honesty of this man's nature asserted itself, and Kitty believed in him as much as she loved him.

Yes, she did love him—she could not help it. She had not quite acknowledged it to herself that day when she came home from her ride, and burying her flushed face in her hands, thought of all he had said—so little after all. She had thought then that perhaps it was only gratified vanity, only that she was so proud to have won the love of a man so great and clever, and far above herself in every way—but now she knew better; these long weary days of waiting had taught her how much she wanted him; how, with all the intensity of her nature, she craved to look once more into the grave, tender eyes, and feel the grasp of the strong hand. Kitty's face flushed impatiently at her own "foolishness." She stretched her pretty neck out of the window to cool her cheeks in the

soft morning air, and get a better view of the little path that wound across the fields to Erlesmere.

Somehow she had not cared to ride this morning, and she was dressed with more than usual care, and she looked more than usually pretty. Her brown-holland dress was plain enough, almost coarse, but it fitted to perfection, tracing the beautiful supple lines of her young figure, and her chestnut hair was twisted in wonderful coils around her little head. Only a pretty English girl, without a single ornament to relieve the simplicity of her dress, but fairer to look upon than many a grand lady in silk attire.

Kitty Lorton was an only child, left very much to her own devices, free to find her own amusements and occupations, and with no kith or kin to care much what became of her. Her mother had died when she was a little child. Her father, a half-pay captain, late of H. M.'s —th Foot, with a would-be grand air, and dubious antecedents, was looked upon with suspicion and treated with marked coldness by all the county families round Erlesmere. His only occupations were betting and gambling, and he was to be found daily in the billiard-room of Sloughborough (the county town near Erlesmere) smoking cheap cigars, and ready to prey upon any game that came within reach. At the annual county race-meeting he was always to be seen, betting-book in hand, delivering his "tips" with a patronizing air to the gilded youth of the sporting fraternity, and he would even so far condescend as to relieve them of their superfluous cash when an opportunity offered.

He had come into a small property soon after his wife's death, which included an old rambling house just outside the Erlesmere grounds, and there he had brought his little child, and had lived ever since, with the exception of sundry excursions abroad, where it is to be supposed he dissipated all the remainder of his small inheritance, for there seemed to be little or no money left to spend on the half-ruined house, the neglected garden, or the desolate, motherless child. Poor

little Kitty's forlorn condition gained her one friend. Lady Caroline Deverell found her one day straying in the grounds of Erlesmere, and looking into the sweet baby face, forgot all the father's faults, and forthwith took the child under her protection, and was never-ceasing in her kindness until the day of her death. Kitty shared the instruction of her boy's governess, Kitty rode one of her ponies, Kitty played all day in her garden, was cared for as one of her own children; but Captain Lorton's obsequious thanks and overflowing gratitude for Lady Caroline's kindness to his motherless darling were received with the most distant coldness, the most freezing politeness. Nothing he could do would bring him one inch nearer to Lady Caroline and her set; but though in the first burst of his indignation at the discovery of this fact he vowed his child should not associate with people who were too grand to know him, yet eventually his prudence got the better of his anger, and he was too wise to stand in his own light. It was so great a convenience to him to have the child taken care of all day at the great house, that after the indulgence of a good deal of strong language on the subject, he resolved to pocket his pride and leave her to go there as much as she pleased. And then, when Kitty grew up, Lady Caroline loved her and treated her as her own daughter, took her to the annual Sloughborough balls, lent her a horse instead of a pony, and disregarded the indignation of all the county dames, who, jealous for themselves or their daughters, could not bear that Kitty should be brought amongst them as one of them, and snubbed her and treated her with as much coldness as they dared show to Lady Caroline's protégée. But pretty, saucy Kitty cared nothing for their coldness, and laughed and flirted and won all hearts with her sweetness and fresh young beauty. Lady Caroline rejoiced more than any one in Kitty's triumphs, and looked forward with pleasure to the day when she would choose one of her numerous adorers, make a good marriage, and be free forever from the contaminating influence of her disreputable father. It grieved her sorely when she was dying to feel that the girl

was left unprotected, and Kitty shed the bitterest tears that had ever dimmed her bright eyes when she knew that her kindest, truest friend had left her alone in the world. But even through the mist of tears there dawned a bright hope of one who should protect her and care for her through life unto death. She sorely needed protection, for there was no one left to take care of her but the vagabond father, who had little thought but for his own amusements and dissipations. Now and then he would wake up to take a selfish sort of pride in Kitty's beauty and refinement—he would build castles in the air of the grand match Kitty should make: he would exult in the idea of *his* daughter queening it over the best of them, and exciting the envy of the grand county people who had dared to look coldly on him; but usually he manifested an absolute indifference to what became of her. Sometimes he seemed even to resent her superiority to himself, and he appeared to take Lady Caroline's death as a personal injury. What right had she to raise his daughter above her proper station, and then leave her to come back to him and his poverty?

It would not have been wonderful if Kitty had not cared much for this father, who had been so little of a father to her; but she did love him, with a strange sort of pitying tenderness, not at all like the love of a child for a parent. She was so compassionate to his faults, so quick to resent it if any one blamed him, so eager to hide all his weaknesses. She blamed herself for wishing to leave him all alone in his old age—such a miserable, pitiable old age it would be. And he was aging so rapidly—late hours and constant excesses were making him old before his time. And yet she could not but feel that the life she would have to spend with him would not be a fit one for a girl of her age—only nineteen. Was she to live for the future with no associates, no belongings but this old man and his dissipated companions? No, she could not live so. She had other hopes now—hopes which made her heart beat faster and her soft cheek flush deeper as she leant against the window watching the path that led from Erlesmere.

"Will he come?" Again and again she asked herself whether, after all, she had been deceiving herself—whether she had been making too much of what was only an idle flirtation—whether she had been foolish to think he meant anything by that brief love-making under the trees? That was the first and only time he had spoken to her in that way. They had spent many days together during this long bright summer, when Lady Caroline was slowly dying, and Guy had come from Italy to be with her; but Kitty had never really thought he cared for her until that day, and then she had believed she had read in his eyes that he loved her.

Would he go now without coming to bid her good-by? She had heard from the servant that Mr. Lawrence and his brother were going to leave Erlesmere, and that the house would be closed for the present. Surely, surely he would never go without coming to see her once more? They had grown so intimate in their daily association during Lady Caroline's illness, been such friends, if nothing more.

Poor Kitty! She was sick and weary of waiting; her eyes were strained with watching; she turned from the window and threw herself into a chair, looking round the poor, barely furnished little room, in the hope of finding something to do; but it was hard to do anything while all the time she was conscious that she was expecting some one who would not come. She twisted her little white fingers in and out, she tapped her pretty foot impatiently on the floor, she wished she had gone out for a ride, she began to think she did not care a bit if she never saw Guy Lawrence again. It was only that she was tired and *ennuyée*, and life was very dull and stupid, now that she had nothing to amuse her.

But all at once she started up, and with a face rosy red, rushed to the window again. The sound of a footstep on the gravel path had caught her ear, and, looking down, her eyes rested on a tall, broad-shouldered figure, and a face down-turned, half-hidden by the stooping hat and thick, brown beard. Her heart beat quickly; he had come to see her—

another minute and she would stand by him, her hand in his: and then she ran to the glass and began to smooth the *crêpé*, fuzzy hair, to push back the little soft curls that clustered too low on her forehead, to arrange the linen collar that encircled her round, white throat—poor little Kitty!—all to make herself fair in his eyes; and then, with a flutter at her heart, she gently opened the door and waited for the summons that would come for her to go to him. But no message came, and Kitty growing impatient, stole noiselessly down the stairs. There was no one in the deserted drawing-room, but the sound of voices came to her from a little room at the back of the house that looked into the garden. Kitty crept past the door, on into the kitchen.

“Jane, who was it came just now?”

“Mr. Lawrence, Miss. He asked for master, and went into the study.”

“Into the study?”

“Yes, Miss; and awful grave he looked, to be sure; they do say he took on about Lady Caroline’s death a deal more than the other one—Mr. Bertie.”

And then Kitty came away, and rushing back to her room threw herself on the sofa and buried her flushed cheeks in her hands to hide a glad exultant smile that would ripple all over her face. Not very well versed in the ways of the world was Kitty Lorton, but for all that she thought she could guess why Guy Lawrence wanted to speak to her father, and what sort of conversation was going on in that little room. How well she could imagine how they would both look and speak—Guy with his calm, grave face, his low-toned voice and quiet manner; Captain Lorton, with his braggadocio air and loud tones, put on to hide the uneasiness he always felt in the presence of those whose superiority was a reproach to him. He was a gentleman by birth; he had once been a gentleman in manner and habits; he still retained enough of the instincts of his class to make him conscious of how low he had sunk, to make him painfully self-assertive and uncomfortable in the

presence of those with whom he should have been able to associate as an equal.

Kitty colored painfully as she thought to herself of all this. She knew that Guy would try hard to ignore it, but it could not but jar upon him. She loved her father, and she would scarcely acknowledge, even to herself, how much it pained her, as she sat there waiting, to know that Guy would not be able to feel any respect or honor for him. Never mind; he was good, he would make allowance for her poor father, he would be blind to his faults.

How long the time seemed—would it never end? Once or twice she crept down the stairs, but only the murmur of voices reached her ear. She went back to her room and paced up and down, with her hands pressed against her heart, as if to still its beating. She never doubted the issue of the conversation, or that she herself was the cause of it. Guy Lawrence was no friend of her father's, had never before entered his doors, and he could have but one object in coming now. But still this suspense was hard to bear.

And then she turned to the glass and wondered how he could love her, wondered whether it was all for the sake of the pretty little face that looked back at her with bright excited eyes, and wished she was ten times prettier, to be worthy of him.

Poor little Kitty, with her childish face, her warm heart, her unwavering faith, all to be changed so soon and so terribly! The world seemed so bright and fair, so full of hope and love and unspeakable happiness to her now. In the overflowing gladness of her heart she threw herself on her knees by the open window, and looking up into the blue sky, thanked God that he had been so good to her. It was only a childish, impulsive little thanksgiving, just as the birds in their outbursts of song on a bright summer's morning seem half unconsciously to be thanking the Giver of all good things for the light, and sunshine, and air which have made their hearts so glad.

For Kitty was only a little heathen, with a very dim con-

consciousness of what was right and what was wrong; and in the after-time, when all hope, and trust, and love seemed crushed out of her heart and life, she thought of that prayer with a bitter disbelief in the Providence that had made her lot so hard. At last the door of the room downstairs opened, a quick step crossed the hall out to the gravel walk, and, looking down, she saw Guy Lawrence pass through the little garden with hurried strides, without once turning his face toward her.

She was bitterly disappointed; she had certainly expected to see him; but she had little time to think or wonder, for she heard her father calling her, and taking one last look at Guy's departing figure, she hastened downstairs.

Captain Lorton called her into the drawing-room, and told her with a mysteriously important air he wished to speak to her; and Kitty stood before him with a little, blushing, eager face, which she tried hard to make appear unconscious.

Captain Lorton took a turn round the room, twirled his mustache, looked out of the window, and began in an uneasy, hesitating sort of way, for all his pompous manner,

"H'm! my dear, I want to talk to you—very important matter. Lawrence—aw—has done me the honor to make a proposal for your hand."

Ah! she was right. What glad, bright eyes took one swift glance at her father's face, and then hid themselves under the long, drooping lashes.

"He says his brother will be of age in a short time, a comparatively short time—two years, in fact. He assures me that his prospects are—ahem!—everything that can be desired; that, should you wish it, you can live at Erlesmere, and that he will make handsome settlements on you—on you, my dear. Most unusual, I'm sure, and I may say, most handsome."

Kitty was staring at him with dazed eyes and a face utterly confused, from which every vestige of color had fled.

"His brother!" she gasped. "What do you mean? What has his brother to do with it?"

"Simply this," sneered Captain Lorton, dropping the

grandly pompous manner he had thought necessary for the occasion; "the young fool's in love with you, and he'd find it precious hard to get you, I can tell him, penniless young beggar! only that Lawrence has chosen to come forward and promise him a thousand a year, from the day of his marriage; and more than that—and it's a piece of devilish good luck, I can tell you, girl—he'll settle five hundred a year on you—only fancy, f-i-v-e hundred. What the fellow can be such an infernal idiot for I can't make out, or why he should trouble himself—" He stopped, aghast. Kitty, with a set, white face, with clinched hands and haggard eyes, came close to him and looked into his face.

"He—wants—me—to—marry—his—brother?" she gasped out slowly and painfully, each word separated with terrible distinctness by the white, quivering lips.

Captain Lorton drew himself angrily away.

"Confound the girl! What's the good of this tragedy-queen sort of play-acting—pretending you don't know all about it? Why, Lawrence as good as told me that you and that young curly-headed fool understood each other—had been spooning all this time, and only wanted my consent."

"He said that?" asked the girl, still in the same hard, unnatural voice.

"Yes—he—said—that," mimicked the Captain, thoroughly provoked. "What the deuce do you mean by pretending you don't understand me? I'll have no more of these fine-lady airs. It's lucky your grand friends mean to do something for you after spoiling you as they have done. A pretty daughter you would make for a poor man. Don't let's have any more humbug about it, Kitty. It's no end of a good catch for you, and you haven't played your cards so badly. You'll be Mrs. Bertie Deverell in less than two years, with fifteen hundred a year, a magnificent house to live in when you please, and a good chance that you or your children will come into the Erlesmere property some day. Lawrence dropped several hints as to the improbability of his ever marrying. Devilish queer

chap, that Lawrence—looked awfully fishy ; white face, heavy eyes—shouldn't wonder if he lived hard ; no knowing what your quiet fellows do on the sly."

And all the while Kitty stood there and listened, her face white and cold, her breath coming in quick, heavy gasps, her hands clinched tightly together. She tried to speak when her father paused, but her words were scarcely audible.

"Papa, there is some mistake, I—I *know* there is some mistake."

Captain Lorton looked at his daughter with a strange scrutiny in his bloodshot, pale gray eyes.

"Have you been playing for higher game?" he asked with a sneer. "You've made a mistake if you have. I advise you to be satisfied with what you've got. Understand this: I'll have no nonsense about the matter. You'll marry this young fellow, or you'll provide for yourself some other way. I've made up my mind to sell this place and go abroad. I'll wait here till your marriage, but I'll be hanged if I stay in this dull hole and keep up this place all for you, who never came near me as long as the fine madam up yonder was alive."

All Kitty's hot temper was roused.

"Don't trouble yourself," she answered, with a curl of her lip. "I'm not likely to be a burden upon you, or any one." Then all the anger melted out of her heart, and only the bitter pain remained. "Father, father, have a little patience; wait a little while. I will give you my answer soon, but I, I—oh, I *must* see Mr. Lawrence first. There is some mistake, I know. I know there is some mistake."

Captain Lorton burst out into a torrent of angry words, but Kitty never heard them. She turned and fled. Snatching up her garden hat from where she had flung it down in the porch a few short hours ago, when she had come in laughing and happy from her morning stroll, she rushed out into the bright glare, half blinded by burning tears, half mad with wounded pride, heedless where she went, so that she might only hide herself away from everybody: so that she might be quite alone;—

alone to realize the utter misery that was in her heart. She went on and on, along the glaring white road, unconscious of the sun beating down on her head, and the great sharp stones wounding her feet in their pretty delicate slippers, with fierce anger and passionate rage swelling in her breast—conscious of nothing but that her love had been rejected with contempt, and that the bitterest insults had been heaped upon her.

She went on, till a turning led her out of the road past a little brook that rippled and murmured over the stones; on, into a dense wood where the trees formed an unbroken canopy over head, and the long grass and ferns grew in rank luxuriance under foot. There she stopped, right in the heart of the wood, and there, safe from every eye, quite alone at last, she threw herself on the ground and buried her face in the soft grass.

Her heart was hot with anger and shame. She could not cry; no tears would come now. Her eyes were burning and heavy, her lips parched and dry. She tried to think of it all, but she had no distinct remembrance of anything that had passed, it was all so confused. It seemed to her such a long, long time ago since she had stood at the window waiting—waiting for what? for the man who was coming to insult her—coming not only to reject the love he had tried to win, but to propose that she—the girl he had trifled with and scorned—should marry his brother! All love, all sorrow were swallowed up in bitter anger, in a feeling that was very near to hatred for this man, whom she had trusted above all others. She lay on the ground with her pretty head sunk in the rank grass and moaned to herself, rocking herself to and fro. She rebelled with all the passion of her nature against the cruel wrong that had been done her. What had she done to deserve such a punishment as this? Had she, in the impulsiveness of a warm, loving heart, been too quick to show her preference—too easily won by a few soft words and flattering looks? It was not that she had loved him and was so utterly, utterly miserable without him. She would try to crush all love out of her heart; she would try to forget the bright dreams that

had made her so glad; but it was that he had despised her, made light of her—perhaps was even now laughing at the silly girl who had been so easily taken in, so absolutely foolish as to believe that he would stoop to make her his wife.

The thought stung her to madness, and she started up with a passionate cry. She had lain there for a long time, till all her limbs were stiff and cramped; her coiled hair was loosened and falling over her face; there were dark lines round her eyes, and a set, hard look on her mouth—the mouth that had been so soft and rosy a few short hours ago. All the young face was changed and hardened. She sat up now; she could not lie there any longer. She would, she must know all the truth.

Several days ago she had received a message from the housekeeper at Erlesmere, with whom she had always been a favorite, asking her to go over and collect the music and other things belonging to her that had been mixed with Lady Caroline's, that they might be sent over to the Grange before Erlesmere was shut up.

She would go now. Her resolution was taken. She coiled up her loosened hair, smoothed her dress, and with almost a smile on her lips, set forth with eager footsteps on the road to the great house, with one fixed determination in her mind, that she would see Guy Lawrence. She would see him, and seeing him, read in his face whether it was true or false. More than that, he should know that she cared nothing for him—if by no other means, she would seem to take pleasure in Bertie's love—she would promise to marry that boy. How her lip curled, and what a little miserable laugh she laughed at the thought of it! What did it matter? She would see Guy. After that the Deluge—she would marry anybody—do anything—get away from the misery and degradation of her present life, and go into the great world and be gay—always gay, and forget that she had ever dreamt of better things—forget that once, when she was a young girl, only nineteen, she had hoped for another life—had hoped to be the wife of a man older and wiser than herself, not the plaything of a foolish, pampered boy.

And so she went on, thinking so bitterly to herself, and crossed the grounds of Erlesmere till she got in front of the house. The sun was sinking lower now, and the shadows from the cedar trees on the lawn were falling on the old gray walls. Kitty crossed the terrace, and went in at the open door into the great silent house. She felt so strange as she crossed the gloomy hall, and the sound of her footsteps on the oaken floor echoed through the long corridor, where the old familiar portraits stared down upon her with the same dead vacant eyes. She thought of herself as she had been and as she was with a sort of pity for her own misery, with a vague wonder how it was she could be so calm, when a few steps would bring her to him—when in a few moments she would know all. Yes, she looked calm enough. Her face was quite set and unmoved, but the beating of her heart nearly choked her as she neared the library door. If he were at home he would be there, sitting with papers scattered about him, or gravely reading in the recess of the mullioned window, as she had so often seen him. Her hand was on the lock; one moment she paused in blind, unutterable terror, and then she knocked softly, and without waiting for an answer, entered the room.

He was there, sitting at the table, but there were no papers in front of him; his head had been sunk on his folded arms, but he raised it when she entered, and then he knew all that was before him—knew that he would with his own lips have to put the seal to his own dishonor. Kitty hesitated one moment, then she went forward, and held out a little cold hand, and spoke in a voice that, in spite of all her efforts, would sound hard and unnatural.

"How do you do, Mr. Lawrence? I was obliged to come here for some of my things. I—I wasn't sure you were here. I'm afraid I'm disturbing you."

He took the little cold hand in his; but acting did not seem to come quite so easy to him as it did to Kitty, or he had not had time to put the mask on. She had taken him by surprise. He scarcely answered—only murmured something about "being

always glad to see her," and she smiled to herself to think he was confused in her presence, knowing he had done her wrong.

"You won't be troubled to make little polite speeches much longer, Mr. Lawrence—you are going away, I hear?"

"Yes, I am going away," answered Lawrence, trying to collect his thoughts, "and I may not see you again. May I tell you now how glad I am—about you and Bertie?"

The words seemed to paralyze her. Some vestige of hope had yet remained to her; now it died out forever, and for a moment she was absolutely speechless with the anger which obliterated every other feeling, and threw down every barrier of pride and assumed indifference.

"It is true, then?" she asked, looking at him with fierce haggard eyes, and her white parched lips could scarcely frame the words.

Guy turned away; he could not meet her eyes fixed on him with such wild entreaty; he knew too well then that he had not deceived himself, that this had been a sacrifice not only of his own love, but of hers.

"Is it true?" she gasped; "you tell me it is true that you have planned a marriage between me and your brother—you have dared to—to—" and then she broke down and hid her face in her hands with a low wailing sound.

It was more than he could bear. He came towards her.

"Kitty, Kitty, for mercy's sake—" and then he stopped. One moment more and he would have told her all the truth; but the memory of his vow came between them.

She caught his hand.

"Guy, you did not mean it—say you were only trying me—trying how much I could bear. See how low I have stooped—I—I—" and then she broke away from him, sobbing bitterly. And there fell on them a silence—a silence that told more than a thousand words. She looked up. She raised her tear-stained face and looked at him. He stood with his arms resting on the mantel-shelf, and his face hidden in his hands. Then, all over her face there spread a deep crimson flush, dyeing her

cheeks and her brow—even her throat—a flush of bitter shame and deepest humiliation. She turned away very slowly. She almost staggered before she reached the door, and then she spoke. Her voice was low and dull; but each word fell upon his ear with terrible distinctness.

“I—I have made a mistake—not in myself, but in you. I can never forgive myself; but you must try to forget that I ever thought you other than you are.”

And then she opened the door and tore away, blind with passion. He made one step towards her, uttered one cry which she never heard, and then with a low moan sank into a chair and buried his face again in his hands.

Then it was he first told himself he had done wrong. Then he felt that no motive, however great, could justify him in this deed. But it was too late now; whatever he might do or say, he could not recall those few minutes, or blot out the remembrance of them from Kitty Lorton's mind. She would never listen to him again, never believe in him again, any word of love from him could only be an insult to her now. In his desperate resolve to sacrifice himself in all things to his brother, he had not only ruined his own life, but he had done her a wrong which no mistaken idea of self-martyrdom could excuse. He saw it now. In his determination to be in all things true to his vow, he had felt that he could not take this girl for his wife, and leave his brother to suffer as he thought a man must, suffer through the loss of her. Ay, more than that, leave him maybe to grow despairing and reckless, and to go to ruin for want of a woman's influence over his life. He knew too that had he, Guy Lawrence, married Kitty Lorton, Bertie, who was so jealous by nature, would have been alienated from him forever, and so he would have destroyed for all time any hope of fulfilling his fatal promise.

And so he, with his set purpose, his strong will, had sacrificed himself, and never flinched from the torture he had caused himself. Not vain by nature, he had thought that Kitty would soon get over it. Only now when he looked in her face, and

heard the words wrung from her in her agony, he realized all he had done—too late!

It was little wonder that he groaned in agony of spirit as he sat there and thought of it all—sat there till the twilight sank into the darkness of night, and the deepest gloom fell over him, bodily and mentally.

And Kitty had torn home at utmost speed, and with crimsoned cheeks, panting and dishevelled, stood before her father.

"Papa, I will give you my answer now. Tell Bertie Devereill I will marry him when he pleases." And there she paused, breathless.

"The deuce! What does all this mean?" stuttered Captain Lorton, looking up amazed from a dirty old betting-book, almost dropping the glass of gin-and-water that he was raising to his lips, from his shaking fingers.

"It's very easy to understand. Didn't you want me to marry him? Didn't you say I was to marry him whether I liked it or not. Haven't I always been a dutiful daughter and done my best to please you? You ought to be happy—happy as I am."

And then she laughed; but the difference of that loud, bitter mirth from her old merry tones never struck her father's ear as he sat there half stupid with drink. He only joined it with his own, and covered her with maudlin caresses, till she broke away from him, and rushing up into her own little room, locked the door and was alone.

CHAPTER V.



ON the morning before the day fixed for their departure from Erlesmere, Guy and Bertie were seated together at the breakfast-table.

Guy sat with his grave face half hidden by the newspaper he held open in his hand. Bertie, always playing restlessly with

anything that happened to be near him, was tracing an elaborate pattern on the cloth with a fork, when he broke the silence :

"Guy, old fellow," he began in his gay, *débonnaire* way, "one might as well breakfast with the Sphynx as with you. What a quiet chap you are. You seem to take a deuced deal of interest in the last sweet thing in divorce cases, or the price of Consols—which is it?"

Guy put down the paper and smiled.

"What is it, Bertie?"

"Nothing much. I'm only in rather a fix as usual, and as you're presiding genius in this place now, I suppose it's the proper thing to appeal to you. You see, I asked Kitty to come over here to-day; there are some things of hers here, and I thought she'd like to take a last look at the place, and all that, and she seemed to think she'd like to come."

Guy winced at the name, at the tone of proprietorship in which it was uttered; but he knew he had no right to resent it, that Kitty Lorton was indeed engaged to his brother.

"Did you think it necessary to ask my consent before you brought Miss Lorton here?" he said.

"Not exactly," laughed Bertie. "Kitty is too much at home here to need treating as a stranger; but you see that tipsy old *guv'nor* of hers took it into his head to cut up rough about it, assumed an air of intense propriety, and said he couldn't allow his daughter to visit at Erlesmere under the circumstances, there being no lady at the house, etc., etc., unless he accompanied her. Devilish good joke, wasn't it?"

"What did you say?"

"By Jove, I was in a fix. What could I say but that of course we should be highly delighted if Captain Lorton would do us the honor to come with his daughter? And all the time I was thinking how black you'd look at the mere idea."

"I *am* vexed, Bertie; but it's not for my own sake. You remember mother would never ask Captain Lorton to enter these doors; and it seems almost like disrespect to her to break through her rules so soon after her death—"

"Hang it, Guy! what could I do? It's hard enough to have such a father-in-law *in futuro* as that; don't visit his shortcomings on my unlucky head. When once I have married his daughter I shall cut his acquaintance, and if he thinks he is going to hang on to our skirts he'll find he's mistaken. Kitty's a brick—an angel; but her father is a precious mouthful to swallow. By Jove! it would have been enough to prevent many fellows from marrying the girl."

"Stop, Bertie. He is her father, remember; and though it's hard to feel any respect for him, you ought to treat him with civility."

"Well, anyhow," said Bertie, moving to the door, "he'll turn up here this afternoon, I suppose. You needn't see him unless you like, and I must make the best of him."

"Stay; as he is coming it will be better perhaps, more hospitable, to ask him to dinner. It can't do much harm, and we'll try to get on with him as well as we can, for your sake, and—for his daughter's."

"All right, old fellow, just as you please, only don't give him too much liquor. Shouldn't wonder if we had to carry him home," and Bertie went out with a laugh, leaving Guy to think how he should entertain this girl and her father. She, whom he had pictured as the mistress of his home, was coming there as his brother's future wife. That was enough to make him forget all small worries.

He had heard nothing of Kitty Lorton since he had parted so miserably from her a few days ago—heard nothing but this one thing, that she had promised to marry his brother. How it had come to pass, or how to reconcile it with the belief which had been forced upon him when she had spoken to him in the library, he knew not, and could not ask. Only the fact remained—the overwhelming fact that made everything else seem trivial and unimportant. What Guy Lawrence suffered during this time, how hard he struggled with himself not to let his love overmaster him, none ever knew; but the misery of those few days was never forgotten in all his after-life.

Sometimes he almost felt as if his love and his jealousy must get the better of him. Sometimes he tried in vain to remind himself that she was his brother's promised wife, and never, never could be his; and he could not help feeling a fierce delight in the remembrance of her half-confessed love. He felt as if he could not bear the sight of his brother's careless, boyish happiness. Oh, Heaven! what misery for him, who would have given all he possessed if he might have taken the priceless jewel of her life into his own keeping, to see it rough-handled by one who scarce appreciated its value. The woman he would have won for himself he had himself given into the arms of another. The sacrifice was made, and was past all recalling, though, when he knew what it had cost her, as well as himself, he would have recalled it if he could. He was unhappily mortal, and though he was capable of sacrificing his own happiness, he was not capable of witnessing another's enjoyment of that which he had lost without begrudging it to him. Such heroism, such unselfishness was beyond his attainment, and he felt that it would be torture to him to see them together; but he trusted that the strength which had never failed him yet—the powerful will which had held his love down without word or token of it, even while she, the woman who had awakened it, stood before him and pleaded to him, would not fail him now, but would enable him to play his hard part to the end.

That afternoon, as he sat in the darkened library, there came to him sounds of ringing laughter and light footsteps, as Kitty and Bertie were wandering through the old house, and over the terraces and through the gardens.

Kitty's laugh seemed louder and gayer than usual, and the restless footsteps seemed never quiet. How the laughter jarred on him: how it seemed to dispel all his illusions. He felt as if it were all a miserable dream. This girl, who seemed overflowing with wild spirits, could not be the same who had stood before him, in that very room, a few days ago, in the abandonment of a sorrow she had not been able to hide? Had she only been acting a part from some poor motive of her own?

He could not bear to think of it. His life did indeed seem utterly dark, for he had not even her memory to cherish, if she were indeed so different from the Kitty he had loved.

They might at least have left him alone in his misery—they need not mock his desolation with the sound of their joy, he thought impatiently—for their ill-timed merriment almost maddened him.

He did not leave his room until it was close upon the dinner hour, but when he joined his guests in the drawing-room it would have been hard to trace any signs of emotion in the grave, strong face, that was only a little paler and quieter than usual, or in the courteous, gentle manner that was only a little more formal. Kitty had thrown herself on a couch. She had some roses in her hand, and some in her hair and in the bosom of her white dress. A broad black sash tied in the folds of soft muslin round her waist, and a black ribbon encircled her round, white throat. Her cheeks were as bright as the roses, and her eyes were shining. Guy thought, as he looked at her, he had never seen her more bewitchingly beautiful. She seemed the perfection of youth and beauty—overflowing with health and happiness.

Bertie was leaning on the side of the couch, bending over her, looking into her eyes, and whispering into her ear soft nothings, which provoked the gay retorts and the laughter which sounded louder and less musically in Guy's ears than the little rippling laugh he had once loved so well. The third person in the room, Captain Lorton, seemed to find himself *de trop*, for he was hovering uneasily about, examining the pictures through an eye-glass, and making little remarks thereon with the air of a connoisseur, which fell on unheeding ears, till Guy took compassion upon him and did the honors of Erlesmere.

However hard he found it to endure the assumption of familiarity, yet withal the obsequious deference, which Captain Lorton tried to hide under the pompous fussy manner, which he put on as he did his dress-coat, for great occasions;

however hard it was to keep his attention and his eyes from wandering to those other two, Guy did not allow one sign of irritation or of weariness to escape him.

Throughout the dinner too—that horrible dinner which seemed such an eternity to him—he devoted himself almost entirely to the entertainment of Captain Lorton, and tried hard not to let the constraint which he felt whenever he spoke to Kitty, show itself in his manner to her; and however much the parade of devotion, the low-toned remarks, the smiles and glances that passed between those other two—who seemed to make the little tendernesses allowable to “engaged” people as conspicuous as possible—really disturbed his composure, they never appeared to ruffle the easy indifference habitual to him.

But when after dinner Captain Lorton sank into a chair and—after many unsuccessful struggles to keep awake—into the arms of Morpheus, and Kitty and Bertie stood together in the window laughing and talking, Guy, thinking himself unnoticed, stole out of the room.

He went out into the still summer night, and the quiet beauty of the sleeping world fell on his aching, weary heart with a sense of soothing restfulness. The hushed repose, the tranquil solemnity seemed to rebuke the human passion, the human misery under which he was fretting and chafing. He wandered away into the twilight gloom that lay under the trees, where the pale, pure stars began to shine dimly through the leafy branches, and there, where it seemed as if no sorrow or passion, bitterness or suffering, could ever intrude, and tried to gain strength for the burden which seemed almost greater than he could bear.

When he came back he entered the room very quietly, unwilling to disturb its occupants, and thinking himself still unnoticed he sank into a chair where he could not hear what they said, but where he could see the outline of the two figures standing out against the gray evening sky. He might not see Kitty Lorton again for a long, long time, and he wanted to take his farewell look at her unobserved.

He was destined never to forget it.

She was leaning against the oaken frame of the window, and Bertie was standing with one foot on the terrace and one on the sill very close to her.

Kitty saw Guy come into the room, and the spirit of revenge and mad coquetry entered into her and took possession of her. Her instinct taught her that though he had not cared to marry her he had loved her well enough to have been sorely pained by the gayety of her manner, by the well-acted love she had shown for Bertie throughout the evening. She felt that she could pain him yet more.

Guy did not know that she had seen him come in. He would therefore assume that whatever he saw her do now she did naturally—not for the sake of wounding him. Well, she would give him cause to think once and forever that she loved his brother—not *him*. She would make him forget that scene in the library.

Bertie had been talking love to very cold and inattentive ears, but now Kitty's manner suddenly warmed, and she bent forward and listened. She raised her eyes and met the passionate light in his.

"Kitty," he said, reproachfully, "you are so cold and listless—a little while ago you seemed so gay and happy; but now when I talk to you, you scarcely answer, and your thoughts seem miles away. Do you remember that in a few minutes I must say good-by to you, and go away from you for such a long time? Oh, Kitty, do you love me—look at me once and tell me that you love me."

"Why do you doubt it, Bertie?" leaning forward and laying one little hand on his arm. "Should I—should I marry you if I didn't love you?"

"Heaven knows! Women are so inscrutable; there is no reason why you should. You have had a dozen lovers more worthy than I yet. Kitty, you are sometimes so cold, I cannot help doubting you. Give me some proof—show me once that you love me before I go," he pleaded earnestly.

For a moment there was a silence. The girl's head drooped and her eyes were hidden. Then she suddenly raised her face, flushed and quivering—threw her white arms round Bertie's neck, and drawing him close to her pressed her fresh red lips on his in a long, lingering kiss. Then as suddenly her arms fell listless to her side; her face that had been crimsoned with a burning flush turned white as death. She stood like a marble statue, while Bertie, intoxicated with joy, lavished on her a shower of caresses, a torrent of eager impassioned words. She only knew, she only felt that she had succeeded in what she had intended to do—she had paid one small portion of the terrible debt she owed Guy Lawrence. Watching him without seeming to do so, she had known that not one movement, one look of hers had escaped the dark eyes that were fixed upon her. She had felt, rather than seen, that he had started and flinched, as a man would flinch at some sudden acute pain, when she had pressed her lips to Bertie's; she had seen him clinch his hands with nervous force, and then after a minute she knew that he had risen from his chair in the far-off dark corner, and crept noiselessly out of the room.

• Ah, if she might have followed him then, if she might have had the right to go to him, and weeping out all the storm of passionate anger that was in her heart, tell him how bitterly she already repented the poor little triumph she had won—how dearly it had been bought, how soon repented of.

But she could only stay where she was, and, crushing all the aching pain, the desire to give way and break out into bitter sobbing, play her miserable part to the end.

Guy Lawrence only appeared again in time to bid his guests good-night. He went out on the terrace with them, and they all stood there for a few moments talking; or rather Captain Lorton was talking, for he roused up from his heavy slumber in a wonderfully garrulous, not to say affectionate, mood, and Guy was only patiently listening; while Bertie, waiting to escort them home, stood a little apart with Kitty, and noting

tenderly the worn look on her pale face, attributed it to sorrow at parting from him.

How little he knew all that was in her heart at that moment.

And then the inevitable "good-by" had to be spoken; then her trembling hand just touched Guy's, and she turned away with her father and her lover, and he went hastily into the house.

They little knew, as she turned her cold white face to take one last look at the old gray building bathed in a silver sheen of moonlight, what a miserable eternal farewell she took of the bright hopes of happiness that had so short a time ago gladdened her young life.

They little knew as they bade her good-night and watched her gliding noiselessly up the stairs, what a storm of tearless sobs would convulse that delicate figure; how far into the night, through the silent hours, the lonely, motherless girl knelt by the open window and looked across the quiet fields to the house where she had been so happy, till the moon waned and eastwards the dawn reddened the sky, and a gentle breeze sprang up and fanned the little hot, sad face and closed the weary, aching eyes.

That was how Kitty Lorton took her farewell of Guy Lawrence.

CHAPTER VI.

THE morning dawned bright and fair. The brothers were to leave Erlesmere together: they had decided to do so after Lady's Caroline's death, intending to pay a long-promised visit to a cousin's country-house, and to stay there until the Oxford term commenced. After that Guy had meant to return to Erlesmere and—to Kitty. But now all those bright visions had vanished and everything was altered. Now he only longed to get away from the scene of his

troubles, and he resolved that he would merely accompany Bertie to his destination, remain with him a day or two—as long as politeness to his cousin required—and proceed on his travels alone. But it had occurred to Guy that as things had changed with him, so had they changed with Bertie also, since the original plan of leaving Erlesmere had been decided upon. So he proposed to Bertie to throw over the visit and remain where he was, and knowing that he was not over-fond of his own company, Guy offered, much against his inclination, to stay with him; but he could not feel very sorry that his offer was not accepted, for it was the very suffering of Tantalus to remain there and be a witness to the joys a cruel fate had denied to him.

“It was better not to upset the plan that had been made,” argued Bertie, who had a selfish horror of painful memories or melancholy associations; and after his first short grief for his mother’s death was passed, tried to shirk even the memory of it. “I can’t bear this place now; I wish with all my heart I could stay near Kitty. I’d give anything to be able to be with her—little darling—but I can’t stand this house now; it’s so infernally gloomy, reminds one of all sorts of horrors. I must get away. Charlie promised me some first-rate shooting, and I can run over and see Kitty, you know, before I go back to Oxford.”

And Guy was glad of the decision, though he secretly wondered at it; and he resolved that he himself would go abroad as soon as he could get away. There was no longer any attraction for him in England; he would return to his old haunts, his old pursuits, take up his head-quarters in Rome, and in the old life try to forget the brief madness of this summer that was passed. In the vacation he might be with Bertie, make some short tour with him, or stay with him at Erlesmere, if he wished. He resolved he would always hold himself in readiness, for though he could not bear to seem to set watch and ward over his brother, yet he was terribly anxious to keep up his influence over him in every possible way. Guy

Lawrence was thinking of all these things as he stood on that last morning in the breakfast-room at Erlesmere, waiting for Bertie, and the sunlight fell on a worn, anxious face, and eyes undermarked with dark, heavy lines, born of sleeplessness and sorrow.

There was something of autumnal freshness in the morning; the grass was bathed in gossamer, and the distant landscape was breaking through a purple, misty veil. Such a fair scene lay before him; but he turned away from the open window with a smothered sigh, and examined the two unopened letters he held in his hand.

The writing on one of them seemed half familiar to him; he looked at it critically and then broke the seal. It was a long letter—the writing was very large, bold, full of character, but it was almost illegible in some places, and adorned with many blots and emphatic dashes. As Guy read the first page, a smile flickered on his face, as if the style or language of this letter—evidently a woman's—caused him some amusement, but as he read on the smile very quickly faded, and the worried, anxious look deepened.

It began thus:—

“MY DEAR GUARDIAN,—How shall I begin? How shall I write of all I yearn to tell you—of all I must tell you, without causing you pain, without appearing ungrateful? You, my preserver and saviour, found me in the streets, a waif, having no friends, no home, living a degraded, vagabond life. You rescued me from ill-treatment, from want and shame, from no other motive than the kindly impulse that sprung from your generous heart. Madre di Dio bless you for it. But when I look out into your streets and see a half-starved bird fluttering his dusky feathers in the wind, only eager to pick up such chance crumbs as fortune throws him, like the little vagabond he is, I think of him caged, sheltered from wind, and cold, and want, but striking his wings in wild despair against his bars, or drooping in his dainty prison, longing for the liberty he has lost.

"You have sheltered, clothed, and fed me; you have saved me from the misery of a degraded life; yet these walls seem to me a prison. I feel shackled by the discipline of my daily life; vagabond instincts still possess me. I long to be unfettered. My home should be the open world. I would be a beggar in the public streets again, if only I might be free. Oh! how miserably ungrateful you, my benefactor, will think me. I despise myself for my wretched discontent; and you will regret the kindness you have shown me when you find that *this* is my only return for it; but I feel that I must speak to you—that I must beseech you to save me from a life that would kill me. You have chosen for me a future that would be to me a hopeless servitude—the career of a governess. Think, I entreat you, what my life would be.* I, who chafe under the constraint of your formal conventionalism, would need to check all freedom of action, all independence of opinion, all thought of self, to be subject to the caprice of others—others who would despise me for my low origin, and hate me for my superiority to themselves. You have not seen me for years. You think of me—ah, do you ever think of me?—as the wild, uncultivated, miserable child you found me; but I am now a woman, resolute in will, beautiful in face and form. You will call me vain; but is it vanity to be conscious of these gifts, to glory in them, because I know the power they will give me? If it is, then I am vain. And now I tremble with agitation, for I approach the one ambition of my life. My heart beats with enthusiasm, but it throbs also with anxiety; for in your hands, in your decision, rests my destiny.

"I want to be an actress. I want to win for myself a position to which I have now no claim. I would conquer with my talent and my beauty, so that I should not need to blush for my low origin; so that men should admire and women should envy me. I *can* do it. I feel, I know I *can* do it, if you will help me. Will you leave me here? The restraint is killing me: the people you have left me with dislike me: they dislike my ways, that I have not been able to mould to your

English standard; my intolerant spirit, that will not be fettered or dragged down to the dull level of their English proprieties; not a spark of sympathy unites us; we seem like beings of two different worlds. How wearily the years have passed since I came here, and yet the memory of you is fresh as ever. I have never seen you—not once. Not once since that day when I clung to you and cried in my childish despair at being parted from you. Oh, how I have longed and longed in vain to see you. Let me see you now, that I may plead my own cause with you. Be my friend as you have ever been, my only friend, and grant my prayer. Forgive me if I seem ungrateful, and believe that I never for one moment forget all your goodness to me, or cease to bless you for it.

“CELIA RAGONI.”

When he had finished reading this strange letter, Guy Lawrence stood looking at it, as if he were lost in amazement. “The girl must be mad,” he thought, “mad with conceit and vanity, to write such a farrago of high-flown nonsense;” and then he hastily opened the other one. It ran thus:

“Laburnum Villa, St. John’s Wood.

“SIR,—I feel it is my duty to write to you respecting the young girl, Celia Ragoni, whom you placed in our charge eight years ago, and who was then supposed to be about twelve years of age.

“In consideration of the very handsome sum you paid us for her board and education, and being also extremely anxious to oblige the son of our dear benefactress, Lady Caroline Deverell (now departed from this mortal sphere), we undertook the charge of this young person. You must pardon me if I admit that we have never ceased to regret having done so, and that nothing but the fact of our being in very necessitous circumstances would have induced us to continue the charge.

“I write now to beg that you will inform us what are your wishes with respect to Celia Ragoni. I regret to say that she

is extremely wilful, very vain and forward, and pays no attention to any of her studies except singing and Italian. For these we have provided her with the best masters, according to your instruction, and these she cultivates with persevering assiduity. Understanding that it was your intention to educate her for a governess, we have tried to carry out your wishes; but in vain: she is absolutely ignorant of many things a lady ought to know. She shows sad proofs of her miserable birth and early education in wickedness. These faults I fear will never be eradicated, she manifests such want of the modesty and reticence befitting a young woman—but, alas! what else can be expected from the child of an actress? She is extremely passionate and violent, and my sister and I regret to inform you that we can no longer undertake the responsibility of watching her. We feel certain that she will lead us into some trouble, and that we are not capable of controlling her, neither is she a fit inmate of our humble and modest home.

“ Begging, therefore, that you will communicate to me your wishes with respect to this young person,

“ Believe me to remain

“ Your obedient servant,

“ TABITHA MORGAN.”

Guy closed the letter, and his thoughts wandered to a time and a life long past, almost forgotten in other hopes, other cares.

In the Quixotism of his nature, when he was young and full of warm sympathies, easily excited by the misery and suffering of others, he had taken upon himself a charge which then seemed light enough, but which now was likely to cause him much anxiety and trouble. Eight years ago, when all his energies had been centred on one object—the study of painting—he had lived for some years at Rome, and had become a pupil of the most celebrated of the many artists who congregated there. Daily, as he went to and from the studio, his attention was attracted by a little girl, who in a tawdry spangled dress,

with a tambourine in her little sun-browned hands, sang and danced in the public streets. First, he only noticed the child's picturesque attitudes, her tangled locks, large bright eyes, and her sweet childish voice, but soon he began to feel an intense pity for the miserable unchildlike life the poor little thing was compelled to live. Each day he watched her grow thinner and more starved-looking, her spangled dress hung loosely and more loosely on her attenuated little figure, her big eyes grew bigger, and her voice, that had been so sweet and clear, grew weaker and weaker, and sometimes failed utterly.

When she broke down in her song or her dance she would steal a piteous look at the man who had the charge of her. At last there came a day when the child's voice was scarcely audible, and the listless limbs refused their office, even though the poor little dancer evidently tried her utmost under the influence of fear. Guy, watching from a distance, saw the old man go close to her and mutter something in her ear; then dragging the shrinking child by the arm, he gathered up the glittering tambourine and the little piece of carpet on which she used to dance, and turned into one of the narrow by-ways that led out of the crowded thoroughfare.

Lawrence followed them at a distance through many streets and dirty unfrequented lanes—the old man in his tattered costume still dragging the shrinking child after him—till at last, in a street more lonely and squalid than the rest, he halted, breathless with haste and anger, and turning on the child, his hand descended on her head and shoulders in a shower of heavy blows, accompanied by fierce oaths and curses spoken in a curious jargon—a mixture of French and Italian.

A moment later Guy had seized his collar and hurled him across the street, and the child was clinging with piteous sobs to her protector. For a minute the man lay on the ground stunned by the fall; the next he sprang at his assailant's throat with thin, tigerish fingers, but Guy only shook him off as he would have shaken off a noisome insect. There followed a volley of foul language, but Guy arrested it. With his

quiet, authoritative air, his not-to-be-shaken determination to give the old man up to the authorities for ill-treatment of the child, he gradually drew from him a confession of the truth.

He was a Frenchman, and the little singer was the child of a poor Italian dancer, who, after a life of sin, had died in the utmost wretchedness in a garret in a back street in Paris. The child, left absolutely destitute, had fallen into the hands of this man, who owned the wretched house where the mother died. He had kept her in the hope of gaining money by the precocious talent she manifested both in singing and dancing. Things had grown worse and worse with the old Frenchman; he had been compelled to leave Paris, and he had taken the child from city to city, earning a wretched subsistence from the few pence that were thrown to her in the streets.

"But now her voice had failed—they were starving, he had no means of returning to Paris—he should never see his own country, he should die here like a dog—the child was obstinate, and would not sing or dance. Monsieur would surely understand—there were excuses to be made even for him. Without the child he might work his way back to his beloved Paris; but he was kind, he had a heart, he could not desert the little one. Did Monsieur doubt his kindness? Ah, he had seen him beat her in a moment of irritation, but he had not seen all; he could not know how he had been like a father to *la petite* ever since her mother died. Children must be corrected—he had taken her from charity, she was a burden upon him—through her he should starve in this wretched Italy." All this and a great deal more he poured out in a torrent of rapid words, with a thousand deprecatory shrugs of the shoulders.

And while he had been speaking, Guy, listening to the miserable, shuffling excuses, and looking down at the little one clinging to him for protection, had already resolved on what he would do. He gave the Frenchman his address, agreeing with him that he should come to his room that evening, and he turned to go, feeling sure that he would keep the appointment; but the child, bursting into a storm of cries and shrieks,

threw herself on the ground and clung to his knees with her little thin arms, in the desperation of a terrible fear. And so, a few minutes later, Guy found himself walking through the streets of Rome, with the little dancer in her spangled dress, holding his hand with childlike trustfulness, and from that hour he became the guardian and protector of Celia Ragoni.

He gave the child into the care of his landlady to be fed and dressed, and when the old man came in the evening Lawrence found little difficulty in inducing him to relinquish all claim upon her thenceforth and forever. He would have been glad to part with her on any terms, but even his cupidity, excited by an idea of the Englishman's fabulous wealth, was more than satisfied by the large sum of money sufficient to take him to Paris several times over, which Lawrence handed to him, on the sole condition that having signed the paper in which he denied all relationship to or claim upon the child called Celia Ragoni, he should go away and they should see his face no more.

And when he found that his little scene of tender sorrow at parting from his "beloved Celia" was absolutely thrown away upon the cold Englishman, he dried up his tears, gathered up the money, and went on his way rejoicing.

A few days after Lawrence set out for England, taking the child with him; and having induced Lady Caroline to use her influence with an old lady (a *ci-devant* governess, who with her sister then kept a small school in St. John's Wood) to undertake the charge of the child, he took the little Celia and left her in their care.

From that time to the present he had scarcely remembered the serious responsibility he had undertaken—scarcely, indeed, remembered the child's existence, except when he sent the cheque to Mrs. Morgan, receiving in return formal accounts of his protégée's health and progress. Two or three years ago he had received notice that the old lady and her sister had given up taking pupils, but he had written back to ask them

to keep the child until she should be competent to earn her own living, asking them also to give her the benefit of the instruction of all the best masters, believing that the greatest kindness he could do her was to give her so good an education that she would be independent of charity when she was old enough to feel charity irksome. He only thought of her as a child. He remembered, as he stood pondering over the two letters, how the little bright-eyed thing had clung to him at parting, almost worshipping him in her passionate gratitude; how she had refused to leave him, and turned in a fury on the old ladies at St. John's Wood, petrifying them with a storm of abuse, poured out in a jargon utterly incomprehensible to their astonished ears. She was a poor, little, half-starved child then—only ten years old according to the Frenchman, who had wished to attract attention by her precocious talent, but by her own account twelve—and that was eight years ago.

And so Guy Lawrence, holding her letter in his hand, woke up to the fact that his charge was no longer a child; and that he, still a young man, found himself the guardian and sole protector of a girl, a woman twenty years of age, one who appeared to be of a wild, ungoverned disposition and a fiery Italian nature.

He had received several letters from her before, all full of gratitude and affection for her guardian, but none that in the least resembled this. This startled him, and he sighed wearily when he thought how helpless he was in this matter, and that if his mother had been alive she would have helped him and managed for him; but now he was alone, with no woman friend whom he could call to his aid. He was thinking of all this sadly enough, when the door opened and Bertie entered the room with a face bright and gay as the summer morning.

How different their two lives seemed; Bertie's all in the sunshine, his all in the shade. For a moment he shrank from looking at his brother. The last time he had looked upon him, the girl they both loved had been pressed in his arms,

her lips on his face ; but it was only for a moment ; the next his honest gray eyes rested lovingly on the boy, and his greeting was as warm as ever. So often is it the case with generous natures, that they love best those for whom they sacrifice most ; and Guy was trying hard not to grudge to his brother the happiness he had given up to him at such terrible cost.

Two hours after, the brothers left Erlesmere. And Kitty, watching from her window, where she could catch a glimpse of the high road, saw the carriage roll away in the distance, bearing from her the two who had most influenced her young life—the man whom she loved, and the man whom she had promised to marry—and with a bitter cry she buried her face in her hands and sobbed out that she was utterly alone, without a friend in all the cruel, pitiless world.

CHAPTER VII.

BURIED amid the intricacies of St. John's Wood, the haunt of mad doctors, fair members of the *demi-monde*, and that much-to-be-pitied and populous class who have seen better days, was a dilapidated house which would probably have been described in auctioneering parlance as a "charming villa residence, delightfully situate in its own grounds."

The house was a tumble-down building, which might once have been white, overgrown with some straggling creepers which might once have been green. The grounds consisted of two mouldy patches of brown earth, divided by a weedy gravel-path, and a few miserable trees with dusty leaves hanging dry and withered upon their blackened branches. Over all there was an air of poverty-stricken respectability which had almost resigned the struggle to keep up appearances or vie with the ill-gotten prosperity of some of the neighboring houses, whose

green Venetians and gay flower-filled conservatories, flaunted and glittered, like their occupants, in the summer sunshine.

It was altogether a cheerless house, this Laburnum Villa—the abode of Mrs. Morgan and Miss Pratt—these four brick walls that shut out their wilful, passionate charge, Celia Ragoni, from the world in which she was longing with feverish eagerness to take her part, and that had become to her hateful as the walls of a prison.

It was a bright summer's morning. The August sun, which seemed to give gladness and beauty to most things on which it shone, only threw into stronger relief the faded carpet and sad-looking furniture, and showed up all the lines in the careworn faces of the two sisters, as they sat together in their little sitting-room.

Arrayed in their best go-to-meeting dresses—black satins that had evidently been so “dipped” and dyed, and subjected to all the feminine devices for making a new dress out of an old one, that there was little of the original texture left—and sitting bolt-upright in their most uneasy chairs, they were the very pictures of sanctimonious precision—these two elderly ladies.

There was a monotonous precision about the click of Mrs. Morgan's knitting-needles, a well-regulated sameness in the pattern of Miss Pratt's crochet, which to judge from its complexion was about the same age as the lady herself, that was enough to drive one mad.

A melancholy-looking canary hanging at the window in a pagoda-like cage, under the influence of the sunshine so far forgot himself as to outrage the decorous propriety of his surroundings by an occasional chirp—a very doleful, almost sepulchral chirp, it is true, but quite sufficient to give him a reckless, dissipated air, not at all creditable in such a genteel, well-brought-up bird as he.

A dozen times had Mrs. Morgan arranged the strings of her best cap and shaken out the folds of her black satin, so as to show it to the greatest advantage. A dozen times had Miss

Pratt fidgeted to the window and gazed down the gravel path, out into the dusty road, to the great annoyance of the melancholy canary, who could not understand this unseemly excitement, and who appeared scarcely to appreciate the close proximity of a little withered face with sandy brows and light eyelashes.

"Do sit still, Amelia," said Mrs. Morgan, with an air of impatience, giving a jerk to her knitting-needles. "Looking never brought any one yet. Young men of the present day display an incomprehensible indifference to the conventionalities of polite society, I must say. In my time gentlemen showed more punctuality when they made appointments with ladies. But there is a much-to-be-regretted looseness in their manners now."

"Yes, Tabitha," replied Miss Amelia, in a tone of pious sternness, as she returned to her chair and her crochet, "and in their morals."

"And in their dress. That poor, dear angel in heaven would no more have worn their collars and neckerchiefs! No; well-starched stand-ups that kept his noble head erect, and cravats twice round called 'chinnners;' and then his pants!"

"Tabitha!" Miss Amelia stopped her crochet needle, drew herself upright, and, with an annihilating look at her sister, continued in stately tones, "Pray remember that I am present."

"I cannot see that any remark of mine can lead you to the supposition that I was unacquainted with the fact. At your age—"

Miss Pratt flared up: "My age? Well, indeed!—my age?" then changing her tone to ironical humility, "But I suppose conjugal ties must necessarily have a demoralizing effect. I ought to try to bear it."

"Yes; more especially as you are not likely to be subjected to such demoralization, my dear Amelia," retorted her sister with freezing severity. "I do wish Mr. Lawrence would come."

"I suppose it is foreign etiquette to keep ladies waiting,"

answered Miss Amelia, now somewhat calmed. "He has learnt it in Turkey, I shouldn't wonder, for there women are looked upon as so much dirt."

"Yes; I don't approve of young men going abroad so much. They learn sad ways—smoking, drinking, card-playing, and all kinds of improper things. The idea of his bringing home a stray child! Ah! when I think of that poor, dear, sainted creature, Lady Caroline, and what a pupil she was, it makes my flesh crawl to think that I should have become the instructress of this girl."

"I wonder what he will decide to do with Celia?"

"Keep her longer I will not. Untold gold should not tempt me. As sure as I'm alive that girl will come to some dreadful end." Mrs. Morgan paused a moment, and then resting her knitting on her lap, and looking solemnly at Miss Pratt, continued: "Amelia, what should we do if we some day discovered that we had been nurturing a viper in our bosoms?"

"Tabitha!" and Miss Pratt modestly cast down her eyes.

"I mean," continued Mrs. Morgan explanatorily, "that we have been harboring in this house—"

"Hush, Tabitha, don't say it before me, pray."

"No, Amelia, not that, exactly," continued Mrs. Morgan solemnly, "but much the same thing—an actress; and she sank back overcome by the contemplation of such a calamity."

"Why do you even imagine such fearful possibilities, Tabitha? It is incredible that this girl whom we have endeavored to educate as a gentlewoman should sink to such a depth of degradation."

Mrs. Morgan leant back in her chair with a resigned groan, and sniffed vigorously at a huge bottle of smelling salts.

"Now do calm yourself," continued Miss Amelia; "see, your cap is all crooked with the agitation of your feelings."

"It is easy to talk of being calm, Amelia," moaned her sister, "but all I have been through since that girl imbibed these play-acting proclivities is more than tongue can tell. Not content with screaming and practising Italian *bravuras* morning, noon,

and night, she must needs stay up burning the candles, rampaging up and down her dormitory at an hour when any well-regulated, proper-minded Christian ought to have retired to rest. Not a wink of sleep could I get the other night, so I got out of bed and I went upstairs; and if you'll believe me, Amelia, there was that girl standing before the glass in a long white dressing-gown, all her hair streaming over her shoulders in the wildest tangle, raving as if she were demented; and when I said, 'Celia, go to bed this instant,' she turned and said, 'Out, damned spot! out, I say!' Shocking, you know, Amelia. And then she went on, 'To bed, to bed—there's knocking at the gate!' or some rubbish, and put out the light. Oh, it's dreadful; dreadful!" groaned the old lady, rocking herself in her chair, "to think that I should live to see such things go on in my house," and she again applied herself vigorously to her smelling salts.

"Now, Tabitha," interposed Miss Pratt, "pray don't excite yourself; only consider your poor head—and you're rumpling your dress. Dear, dear, you won't be fit to be seen when Mr. Lawrence comes—and one of your side-combs coming out, and your curls all awry. And there he is at the garden gate this very minute, looking as cool as possible, and not hurrying himself the very least." And she peered through the blinds at the tall, well-dressed figure that crossed the path with slow leisurely footsteps.

Guy Lawrence stood at the sun-blistered door, flung away the end of a half-smoked cigar, and knocked with the manner of one preoccupied (not to say bored), that boded ill for the interest he was likely to take in the sins and shortcomings of his protégée.

After a few smirks and bashful eye-droppings on the part of Miss Amelia, she curtsied in a stately manner to Guy, and left her sister alone with him.

With languid politeness Guy listened to all Mrs. Morgan's moaning and lamentation and depreciation of her foreign pupil; only when she had exhausted the topic he quietly

promised that she should no longer be troubled with the charge of Miss Ragoni. He expressed his regret that she should so long have been subject to annoyance on her account, and his desire to see the young lady and ascertain her wishes as to her future.

Mrs. Morgan rose to go; but she hesitated as she reached the door.

"I trust you will make allowance for my anxiety, Mr. Lawrence. Anything it was in my power I would have done for the son of my favorite pupil, Lady Caroline, but the charge of this young lady is too much for me, at my age."

Lawrence bowed.

"I quite understand all that, Mrs. Morgan."

Still she hesitated, with a hand on the door.

"Is it your wish to see Miss Ragoni—alone?"

"Perhaps it would be as well," answered Lawrence with a half smile; "she may be afraid to say what she really wishes in your presence."

"Sir," answered the old lady sternly, "you will soon learn that Celia Ragoni has none of the proper reticence or fear of her elders that characterizes most young women in her station. She never hesitates to say all she thinks, whether it is right or wrong. I wish you good-morning, Mr. Lawrence. I hope you will find her more amenable to control than I have done." And with a formal curtesy Mrs. Morgan left the room, and Guy was left alone to contemplate the glories of some faded paper flowers that adorned the mantelpiece, or to while away the time by admiring the crooked reflection of his own face in the little dusky mirror above, or the melancholy portraits of some by-gone members of the aristocracy as they appeared in the "Book of Beauty," with infinitesimally small waists, attenuated hands supporting pensive faces with impossible eyes and birch-broom eyelashes, all looking as if they were rapidly sinking into early graves and going to a better world.

Guy began to wish himself anywhere but in this dingy room in Laburnum Villa.

It certainly was not a desirable place in which to pass a summer's morning, and the object of his visit was not a pleasant one either. The thought of the girl and her future hung like a weight on his mind. He felt no interest in her. The momentary impulse of pity which had led him to save her from her miserable life had long since died away.

There remained to him only the remembrance of a small child with large brown eyes with a pitiful look in them; whom now he pictured to himself as a gawky girl, with the same half-starved look and professional whine, which she had acquired in the streets eight years ago.

It is not well to repent of a good deed, but Lawrence felt half inclined to repent of the rash charity which had led him to interfere in other people's concerns—for after all it was not his concern to rescue this little waif, this stray atom of humanity. The Quixotic impulses of a generous nature had led him to many an unwise act he had lived to repent of, many an unpremeditated deed that had been done in kindness of heart.

Guy Lawrence had the power to make great sacrifices, but he was not capable of the continuity of endurance, the patience under small worries, which perhaps constitutes the truest self-sacrifice.

He had given up that which he held dearest in the world because it had seemed to him impossible to secure his own happiness at the cost of his brother's; but none the less he felt unable to bear the continual sight and reminder of what he had lost; none the less he felt an intense regret at the necessity of such renunciation.

He had rescued a child from misery, because he could not find it in his heart to look and pass by on the other side, without doing what he could to save her; but all the same he regretted and would have shirked, if he could, the responsibility and trouble that his generosity had entailed upon him.

Human inconsistency marred the heroism of a grand nature.

So Guy waited impatiently for the unfortunate recipient of

his charity, and in his heart anathematized the folly which had ended in bringing him to this hot little room, and keeping him there a prisoner to be worried by an old lady and a tiresome girl.

He pulled his mustache and grinned sardonically as he thought of himself in the character of a guardian angel.

"Look the part, don't I?" he muttered, as he glanced at his own dark face in the crazy mirror.

All the grave sweetness that had come into it with hope and love, had faded out now, and the eyes looked back at him with a dull angry light in them.

Wounded through his love and his faithfulness, too true to those whom he held dear to spare himself at their expense, yet Guy Lawrence cursed the fate which had made life so hard to him.

As he paced impatiently up and down the room, the handle of the door turned, there was a slight hesitation, and then Celia Ragoni came in, and he looked up and saw her; saw the woman whom he had left as a little unkempt child, in the glory of beautiful womanhood.

For she was beautiful, this Celia Ragoni—this nameless, heritageless waif, this child of the people—beautiful with a regal beauty a queen might have coveted. The patrician carriage of her grand head, her proud bearing, her slow stately step, the swirl of her long skirt, as she swept towards him, struck the man who gazed upon her with a momentary astonishment that was not born of her beauty. "Was she an empress incognita, this creature whom his careless charity had rescued from ignominy or death?" But at the next glance, Guy, soi-disant artist, took in the whole splendid physique, the flesh and blood magnificence of Celia Ragoni. She was of the earth, earthy—that he saw. There was no semi-divine light in those slumbrous eyes, over which drooped the heavy white lids (eyes that made him think of volcanic fires), no Madonna-like purity about the make of those warm, full-blooded lips. There was no unfleshy over-refinement, no lack of develop-

ment about face or figure; but there was rare perfection of form and tropical brilliance of coloring about this woman.

Guy thought, as he looked at her, of some splendid-plumaged bird; thought of the mirage in the desert; thought of all sorts of gorgeous tints, rich flowers, heavily scented exotics, burning skies. Thought, do I write?—nay, rather felt; for this was Celia Ragoni's prerogative—to inspire sensation. To look upon her beauty was a species of moral dram-drinking. She stood, in comparison with your ethereal woman, as brandy stands to weak wine and water.

"Pity Rubens had not such a wife," half muttered Guy; "then he would not have sent down for all time a burlesque upon this splendid red and white—this fleshly magnificence."

She came towards him and held out her hand with an air which would have well become Cleopatra receiving Antony.

"At last you have come," she said; and Guy, listening to the quivering of the rich-toned voice, and looking into the eyes which flashed up to him, began to think less hardly of the fate which had brought him there.

"You are changed indeed. Is it possible that you are—"

"The little girl who sang and danced in the streets of Rome—the little girl who well-nigh broke her heart at parting from you? Yes, I am the same—and I have still the same passionate worship for you, my preserver; you, the only one in all the world who ever cared what became of Celia Ragoni."

The voice, with its strange foreign intonation, thrilled with a world of feeling. The words that would have seemed to Guy so high-flown and inappropriate from ordinary lips, came naturally from her, with her rich southern beauty and majestic bearing.

"Ah! could you have known all the desolation and weariness of these years that you have forgotten me; with body, soul, and mind chained down to the horrible level of these dull English lives. Sometimes I have thought I could not bear it; that come what would I must go away and seek my fate in a world where, sooner or later, I must find some appreciation."

She threw out her hands, and her face kindled as she spoke; then her eyes drooped and rested on his. "But I could not go without seeing you, I could not go and let you think me so ungrateful for all your goodness."

"I have never forgotten you," said Guy, thinking he spoke the truth; for indeed how was it possible to look at Celia Ragoni and speak of forgetfulness?

She looked up into his face. "And now you have come to tell me my fate?"

Guy started; he had forgotten. It seemed so strange that he should in any way hold the fate of this beautiful woman in his hands.

He smiled to think how utterly unlike she was to anything he had imagined her to be. Could she be a governess?—this goddess among women! As she stood before him, the sunlight throwing up rich tints in her dusky hair, the soft folds of her plain gray dress falling around her splendidly moulded figure, like the robes of a queen, Guy tried to picture her in a dingy schoolroom teaching some ill-mannered children, or subjected to the petty tyranny of a spiteful mistress; and then his smile turned to a groan as he realized how impossible it would be to choose a life for one gifted with such rare physical beauty which would not be surrounded with a thousand dangers. He felt that this gift of beauty would be to her as a curse, dragging her downwards.

"Your fate is in your own hands, not mine," he said after a time. "How can I wish to control you? You are capable, I should say, of judging for yourself."

"Then you will not refuse my wish. You will let me be an actress?"

"An actress! Heaven forbid! You, with your face, would make yourself a show for fools to gape at? You must be mad to choose such a life."

"What's the use of being beautiful if it can bring me none of the things I desire? I might as well be old, and ugly, and senseless, if I am to be shut up forever within these four walls."

Tell me, how can I gain power and fame, the appreciation that is my due, but on the stage? Will your proud English receive me amongst them, me, the daughter of a despised ballet-dancer, as an equal? Would you have me become the paid servant of one of them, to be reminded a thousand times a day of my low origin? Bah! I hate them all. When I see them drive past, as they go to show themselves off at the cricket matches, with their gilded hair and their false smiles, leaning back in their coroneted carriages with their silken skirts spread out, I smile to think how their beauty would pale before mine; and then I vow to go out into the world and fight them with their own weapons; and make them afraid of me, and jealous of my power. I will win that which makes life worth having—money. Who would care to live in insignificance, obscurity, and poverty? Who could even exist with such surroundings as these?" she said, taking in with a sweep of her white hand all the faded furniture and shabby adornments of the little room.

Guy shrunk from her involuntarily. The hard realism of her nature revolted him. The manner in which she seemed to appraise and value her own beauty, setting no store on that which all womanly women hold as a gift beyond price, but as a means of winning money—made him shudder.

"Child," he said, remembering that she was young, though she looked in the full prime of womanhood, "have you no heart, no feeling, that you speak like this?"

"Do I speak so strangely?" Celia answered with a smile; "do I differ so much from the high-born girls, your equals, who daily sell themselves for gold? It is their trade, their profession; they lay themselves out to win some man no matter how old, how wicked, so that he is rich, and then they give themselves in exchange for money or title. It's a fair bargain—don't you think so! So much flesh and blood for so much gold and worldly honor, and the world smiles on them and gives them glory while it, and you, condemn such as I, who would only use my youth and beauty in the legitimate pursuit of my art. There is only this difference—the matrimonial

market is not open to me with my soiled name and low parentage—who would bid for me?—so I'll make a name and a reputation for myself." Celia paused, and Guy looked at her amazed.

He asked himself, how could this girl, shut up as she had been, have gained so much worldly knowledge; how could she have come to know so well the full value of the power she possessed? He forgot that even in her small world there were men—singing, French, and Italian masters, etc., with whom she had associated. Who was it who said truly that if looking-glasses had never been invented, beautiful women would have read their own beauty in the eyes of men quite as clearly as in the truest mirror that ever reflected lovely face? And so, even in her daily walks, taken with due circumspection and under careful surveillance, Celia Ragoni had not failed to attract observation; and she would have learned that she was beautiful in the eyes of passers-by, if by no other means.

"You say I have no heart, no feeling," she continued, drawing nearer to him, and placing one hand upon her heaving bosom, with a melodramatic air. "What have I to do with such things? Who has ever taught me what love means? Cruelty and contempt are words that have meaning in my ears, but love and tenderness are but empty sounds. Who in all the world ever cared whether *I* suffered, whether *I* lived or died? You rescued me as you would a wounded bird, or some other little helpless thing, only from a humane dislike to see any creature suffer or perish—yet you," she added, her voice softening, her whole manner changing, "you are the only human being who ever cared what became of me. Were it not for you I should hate the world, and hold life not worth the living; but knowing you I know that honor, love, and truth still exist, and I cry out in my despair when I ask myself what has Celia Ragoni to do with these; such things are not for her, the outcast child of a degraded ballet-dancer."

Her face glowed with passionate emotion, and Guy, looking down at her, listening to her wild words, began to feel as if

some spell was over him. The hot air seemed to stifle him, and the great eyes that blazed and burned beneath their heavy lids seemed to enthrall him.

"So you see I am far removed from the pale of human sympathy. I cannot find any happiness in the way other women find it. I—I only am a pariah—an outcast, and I must make my life for myself."

"You speak absurdly," retorted Guy angrily. "No woman can make her own life; and you speak without thought. Shut up here with these two old women, what trial have you made of the world? You, of all others, are calculated to gain admiration and love—too much of it perhaps."

"Too much admiration, too little love," answered the girl with a bitter scorn on her face.

"And you think to improve matters by going on the stage," returned Guy with equal scorn. "You affect a knowledge of the world. Do you not know then that you would be a mark for slanderous tongues, that it would be impossible for you, unprotected by friend or relation, to avoid in such a position the loss of your good name?"

"What have I to do with slander? Who would trouble themselves about me? Nothing to lose means nothing to fear. I have nothing to fear, because there is no loss of good name possible to me, who have none."

"Because your mother was a ballet-dancer of doubtful respectability—pardon me; it is a thing I would not have alluded to if you had left me the option," answered Guy, "is it not possible for her daughter to be innocent and pure? Celia, have some respect for yourself, if you wish men to have any for you. Do not speak of yourself so lightly."

"I speak of myself lightly?" answered Celia, her eyes blazing, lifting her hands in a semi-foreign, semi-theatrical way which was peculiar to her. "I did not think it necessary to keep up the sham to you, who know all about me. You have yet to learn that there is no prouder woman living than Celia

Ragoni; but my pride takes another form to yours. I glory in myself—in what I am—in what I shall be—”

Lawrence interrupted her, speaking gravely. “Celia, listen to me. You think me indifferent to your future; but since I have seen you it pains me more than words can tell to think how little I can protect you. Before I saw you I thought you might be a governess, or earn your living in some way other women do; but now I see you I know that it is true that you are not fitted for such a life. Women are jealous,” he said with a smile. “Some wouldn’t have you in their houses, and those who might be above that sort of feeling would be afraid of the responsibility. You are fitted for any station; but none the less would it be impossible for me to get you an *entrée* into society, though you are as good as any of them. There is only one plan I can think of. You are fond of singing?”

“Passionately. I have been practising in the hope of taking some part where there is singing when I go on the stage.”

“That must never be. Listen to me. This is my plan. I will advertise, or in some way find a suitable companion or chaperone who will take you abroad for two or three years. I will not ask either of these people you are with now,” said Guy, with a smile, “because it is evident you don’t like them. You can study under the very best masters, and society abroad is very different to what it is here. There you can mix in the world which you are so eager to join.”

Celia was going to interrupt, but Guy stopped her.

“You said just now, in words that sounded too coarse for your lips, that you have none of the chances of happiness that other women have; there were none who would care to marry you. You will find out your mistake some day, Celia; you will find that beauty such as yours will win all that you desire—riches and station and love. There will be many too glad to marry you.”

“Is that true?” she asked, lifting her head, a strange light in her eyes. “Would men who are far above me, like you, ever stoop to such as I?”

Guy half turned from her, and leaning his arm on the mantelpiece, rested his head on his hand.

"When you know more of the world," he said, quietly, "my greatness will diminish very considerably in your eyes, if it does not cease to exist altogether."

Celia was silent, and a smile that was almost contemptuous rested on her lips.

Was she thinking that this, the only man she knew who was far above her, showed little proof of the truth of his own words?

"You have not answered me, Celia. Do you approve of my plan? Will you go abroad?"

"No," she replied, drawing herself up, and throwing back her head. "I will no longer be dependent on your generosity. I will not go among strangers, keeping up this farce of being a lady. I will earn my own living. It matters little to you what becomes of me. Let me go my own way."

Guy, looking at her, thought it did matter to him what became of her, more than he could have imagined a few hours ago. It was not possible for a man of his nature, with his intense appreciation of beauty, to be with Celia Ragoni, to look upon her, and not feel that she was supremely attractive.

"I only offer you the same fate I give myself. I am going abroad in a few days."

"You are going away?" said the girl, her face paling, "and I shall never see you again. Is this the only time that my eyes, that have hungered for years to look upon a kind face, shall rest upon yours?"

"Yes. I am going; there is nothing to keep me in England now; but I shall see you again some day. And Celia," said Guy, taking her hand in his, and speaking kindly, almost tenderly, "before I leave you, you will promise me this one thing. You will give up this idea of being an actress? Promise me; if not for your own sake, then for mine."

She took her hand from him.

"What right have you to ask such a sacrifice of me. You,

who for eight long years have forgotten my very existence, and will go away to-day and forget it again. You, who mock me with ideas of equality, and all the while hold me in scornful pity. Who in all the world cares enough about me to say, 'Celia, give up this thing for my sake, because I love you, and could not bear to see you on the stage.' There is not one—not one."

"A little while ago you spoke of gratitude in words I thought over strong for the occasion," said Guy. "If you think I have any claim on yours, give up this thing when I ask you."

"I am not ungrateful. Heaven knows how I have felt to you for your goodness," she answered passionately. "But you ask too much, that I should give up the one hope of my life for you, who will forget that I have done it in a few days' time; you, who have only a whim on the subject, a fear, perhaps, that I shall disgrace you, because you have in some way connected yourself with me. I cannot give up so much. Leave me; let me go my own way."

"Is your own way ruin?" asked Guy.

Celia Ragoni turned on him a look scornfully imperious.

"What you call ruin I will make my triumph. People will envy me yet—*ci-devant* beggar, future actress, though I am."

Guy bent his head with a satirical smile. "Be it so. A woman bent on self-destruction is scarcely worth the saving; but in right of the small claim I did once have upon you, may I ask what you intend doing at present? You cannot burst into a full-blown actress without a moment's notice, and it seems you can't stay here."

Celia's face, which had grown hard and proud, softened. It was necessary still to bend Guy Lawrence to her will. However angry she might feel with him for his opposition to her wishes, she must not show it, for she could not do without his assistance quite yet.

"Do not speak to me so coldly, so cruelly; do not think of me so harshly because I have not been able to mould myself to

the standard of your English proprieties. Can you change the song of the foreign bird you cage into the dull chirp of your native sparrow? Do not utterly condemn me. I will try and do anything you please for your sake, only do not ask me to go abroad with a chaperone, or to try any more to keep up this pitiful pretence of being a lady. Let me be like other women, who have, like me, to earn their own living."

It was hard for Lawrence (it would have been hard for any man) to resist the fascination of her pleading.

"Tell me what you wish, and I will help you if I can.

"My singing master and his wife receive pupils, who live in their house. He gives them finishing lessons, with the view of bringing them out at his concerts. He is ready and anxious to receive me, and I have thought sometimes of going there, if you should oppose my other wish. If you will extend your charity on which I have lived so long, so far as to help me in this, I can live there for the present. The future can take care of itself," answered Celia; but as she spoke, there was a peculiar look on her beautiful mouth that might have warned Lawrence how little she had relinquished the one idea of her life.

"And you would be a professional singer, then?" he said with a frown.

It was strange how repugnant the idea of Celia Ragoni's appearing before the public was to him. Perhaps from that feeling innate in all Englishmen which makes them dread publicity for any womankind in the remotest degree connected with themselves—perhaps from a dog-in-the-mangerish sort of dislike to her beauty being made a mark for other men's admiration. Most likely in any other case, had the facts been laid before Guy and his advice solicited on the subject, he would have said, "What better could she do, with her antecedents and her chances of success?" But Celia Ragoni was not a woman to be seen and forgotten, or tossed aside as a thing not to be desired, and he could not feel indifferent to her fate. Perhaps but for the remembrance of one little piquante face, which, though it would have been dwarfed in beauty by the

side of this woman's, yet had power to steel Guy Lawrence's heart against the attractions of any other, he might have listened to the voice of the charmer who charmed so wisely—he might have held the world well lost for one fair woman's sake; and in his utter weariness and distaste for all things, have given up everything for the sake of that which might be his for the asking, and—repented it ever after. As it was, he felt that the sooner he was away the better.

"What can I do?" was the answer in return to his question, Would she be a professional singer? "I cannot stay here. Would you have me beg in the streets?"

"Give me the address, then. I will make all inquiries of Mrs. Morgan and others, and if it's a proper place for you to go to, you shall. And for Heaven's sake take care of yourself; don't let me have to feel that I only saved you from one sad fate that you might come to a worse."

"The last state of that woman was worse than the first," mocked Celia. "Thank you, pray do not fear for me. Addio—I will go and send Mrs. Morgan to you."

"Shall I not see you again?" asked Lawrence irresolutely, holding her hand in his.

"What use?" answered Celia, drawing herself away almost fiercely. "Are you not as far removed from me as heaven from earth?—as respectability from unrespectability? Let me go."

She turned and swept away, her proud head held high in the air; but as her hand was on the lock of the door, she turned again, and with one swift movement, stood before him, caught his hand and pressed it to her lips.

"Forgive me—forgive me. I am so proud and wicked; and yet I am not ungrateful, if you only knew."

Guy Lawrence, looking down, saw her beautiful bowed face, saw the tears welling in her eyes, saw the full lips quivering passionately. He bent his head lower and lower, and then for one moment his lips rested on hers.

It was only a passing madness, for the next he pushed her

gently from him, and Celia Ragoni, looking on him, saw the brief tenderness fade out of his face, and without a word, she turned and left him.

Five minutes after, when she found herself in the bare little room—one of the attics which she was allowed to call her own—her movements were eminently characteristic. Not even to herself could she be wholly natural. She stood with one hand clinched on her bosom, the other flung listlessly by her side, a world of tragedy in her face. She might have stood for a model of Lady Macbeth or Cleopatra.

In her blind egotism and unlimited faith in the power of her own beauty, Celia Ragoni had thought to reign supreme over the hearts of men. She had dreamt day and night of Guy Lawrence, perhaps had counted on the possibility of his falling in love with her at first sight; at any rate, had reckoned on gaining him over to her side, and bending him to her will. Now she was baffled and thwarted; not only that, there was some real feeling for this man, whom she had made her hero, raging and surging in her passionate heart. Her womanly instinct prevented her mistaking Guy Lawrence's passing admiration for any tenderer feeling, and she could not forgive him that he had been so ready to leave her without any thought of seeing her again. She could not forgive him that he had not fallen down and worshipped her.

Then tragedy subsided, and nature asserted itself. Celia Ragoni dropped her hand, and with a swift movement (she was wonderfully like a tigress, this woman, in all her movements, graceful and soft and stealthy) stepped to the glass, and pushing back the dusky hair from her brow, examined her own face critically, feature by feature, in the little mirror. It was a long examination. She might almost have counted every eyelash in the time. Then she drew back, and a slow, triumphant smile rested on her lips, as, taking a little card from her pocket, she looked at it almost lovingly.

On the card were the name and the address of a well-known theatrical agent in London. And as she raised her eyes they

rested with loathing on the dreary, unsightly walls of the little room which formed so strange a contrast to herself.

"I shall be free at least," she muttered, as she thrust back the card into its hiding-place. "There will be no one to control me where I am going as they have controlled me here; and I will work my way step by step till I make him acknowledge my power."

Was that the summit of her ambition? Was that the crowning pinnacle of all her castles in the air? and had she only yielded temporary submission to Guy Lawrence's wishes, that she might have the means and the increased freedom to enable her the better to work her own will? Ay, if he could have looked on Celia Ragoni's face at that moment he would have known that he had only succeeded in making her more determinately bent on her own wilful way.

CHAPTER VIII.

NO life can be made up of action.

It is impossible for any history or autobiography to give a pre-Raphaelite picture of the life of any man, for it is chiefly the great events, great joys, or great sorrows, that form the tableau. All that dull monotonous detail, that "common round of daily life," that must make so large a part of any existence, however stirring, is charitably allowed by biographers and novelists to sink into the background, or at least mid-distance.

For it is wearisome enough to have to live through so many interludes in our own lives, when the curtain is down and we have nothing to do but look at the drop-scene—i.e., the aspect which life presents to our eyes at that present moment, without boring ourselves with reading of or contemplating the weariness of other people's.

Looking back, even upon the most prosaic existence, consisting only of variations on the same tune, the everlasting "hatching, matching, and dispatching," consequent on humanity, it never seems to us that our lives have been uneventful; and it is because we remember only the leading points, passing over the intervening dead level of neutral tint. For that leaves no impression, is absolutely forgotten, while our great troubles, our brief sweet happinesses stand out conspicuously, and are as present to our minds and to our hearts as on the day when they came to us.

But most sharply defined are the trouble-points, most vividly remembered the sorrows. For happiness drifts into tranquillity; every joy that does not turn into a regret subsides into a calm, and in a long calm days and months go by unnoticed, and leave only a vague remembrance, as of a peaceful dream; but keen-toothed sorrow leaves her sting behind her forever to be remembered. Listen to a grandmother talking to her grandchild of what has been, and you will notice she will dwell most on her sorrows—they will make her dates, the pegs on which to hang her little stories.

The countless days of sameness which draw out the even tenor of most everyday existences, when we do the same things, think the same things, hope and fear the same things, are so many blank pages in our mind-volumes.

So Guy Lawrence, living by himself in Rome, thinking a great deal of the past, very little of the future, and nothing of the present, let the days pass over his head one by one, never heeding when they came or when they went.

He passed an easy dilettante sort of existence; painting a good deal, smoking and moralizing a good deal; strolling by himself under deep-blue, star-lit skies; mixing a little in society, when it was not too much trouble to dress himself in tail-coated attire—the sacrifice to duty which the world expects of every man—not too great a bore to leave the rooms which he had fitted up in luxurious artistic disorder. It seemed as if he had no object in life but to please himself, and yet of all dis-

contented Englishmen Guy was the most hopelessly bored, the most dissatisfied with the set gray life and apathetic end which seemed to be his destiny.

If it had been possible for him to sympathize with any suicide, he might have begun to understand the feelings of the morbid young person who, counting up the many days he would have to go through the routine of dressing himself, decided that it was too much trouble to live, and so put an end to his mortal career and went, it is to be hoped, to a world where clothes are not.

It seemed to him, looking back, as if all the great events of his life had been crowded into one brief period; and then, so quickly, the storm of woe and sorrow and sharpest agony had subsided, and a dead calm set in.

It is so in many lives. Year succeeds year in monotonous peace. We go round and round in the perpetual circle of duties and pleasures till, if we are young and impatient, we cry out at the dulness, and in our weariness sigh for any change. And then when the change comes, according to the old proverb, "It never rains but it pours,"—one event follows close upon another, joys or sorrows treading on each other's heels. And it may be that in sighing and tears, and heart-breaking sobs, we repent the rashness which made us call peacefulness dulness, and forget to congratulate ourselves on the break-up of monotony. It is hard though to live without hope. Guy Lawrence found it hard enough. It is hard to look around you on your fellow-creatures, to see them filling their several places—father or mother, or husband or wife, happy in each other's love, and feel that you are but a solitary atom, a miserable scrap in the vast whole of humanity, with no particular tie binding you fast to the rest. To feel that you have missed your place in the world, have drawn a blank in life's lottery, and are no good to yourself or any one else. At such a time the creature may be tempted to ask of the Creator, Why was I created?

It has been suggested that could we, before we were born,

have been shown all that would be, we should have refused the gift of Life.

But I wonder how many people there are now living who, could they have been shown all the future, would, taking the ill with the good, have chosen not to live.

It is useless to wonder, for the great charm of life lies in the uncertainty of the future, and could we see all that lies before us, we might in our human weakness shrink from the ordeal—from its responsibilities and sorrows, and refuse even this life which we cling to so when once we have possessed it.

For though there are many who cry out in their despair, "I wish I had never been born," would they even at that moment of darkest misery be annihilated even if they could?

Not to be. It is an idea which our limited imagination cannot grasp, so it is a useless speculation at best. It is hard enough for any of us, even the least egotistical amongst us, to imagine the world going on just the same when we are dead and laid in our graves. It seems to us as if it will be like the end of a drama when the chief actor has played his part and quitted the scene.

If Guy Lawrence had been a poor man he might have been something greater than he was—a great painter or a great author, for he had wonderful latent force, only the motive power was wanting to set him to work, and none knew better than he that without labor nothing can be achieved that is worth the achieving. He used to sit for hours together in the gloaming when he could no longer see to paint, lounging on cushions placed in the broad windows which, foreign fashion, reached to the ground, smoking his hookah, idly dreaming, sometimes wishing that his lot in life had been a more active one. It was hard to be only able to watch and wait.

Guy Lawrence did not give way to any very overwhelming despair, or think himself anything but a victim to circumstances. He went about and lived much the same life as he had done before his stay in England, but he felt no violent interest in anything or anybody.

The freshness of life was gone for him, and the picture of the present and the future, as it lay before him, seemed to be painted in dull drabs and grays.

He would have been the last man in the world to make moan over his troubles to any friend, however near or dear, but he used to confess to himself that he had no object left in life but to be of use to his brother—to keep the vow he had made by his mother's death-bed.

He was, perforce, quiescent now. For so long as Bertie was, according to all accounts (and Guy took care to gain every information he could about him), well and happy at college, he could be of no use to him, but when he should be wanted, he, Guy Lawrence, was ready and willing to come to his brother's aid.

Till then he could only wait, and the days dragged themselves on and passed slowly with a wearisome sameness that was more depressing than any acute sorrow.

If Guy Lawrence had been a good man, or even a religious man according to the ordinarily received acceptation of the word, he might have taken to work off his superfluous energies in an attempt to benefit his fellow-creatures, morally and physically, by an injudicious and indiscriminate distribution of soup tickets and tracts, doing a great deal of harm to the recipients of his charity; and perhaps a little good to himself. But being only what he was—a man with a strong sense of honor, an intense power of faithfulness, endurance, and strong, tender love, with very little formal religion, only an infinite belief in the divinity of Him who is over all, and shapes all things to His own ends—he could only silently endure the sorrow which had come to him.

He could only live on, with little or no hope that anything could ever brighten his own dark life, trusting that in the time to come he might help the brother who was now the only one left to him of those he had loved.

It was now six months since Guy Lawrence had left England.

During that time he had seen little of Bertie. He had come, to use his own phrase, "to look Guy up," when he had visited the Continent in the winter with a college friend, a young nobleman of dissipated appearance and a remarkably small share of brains. Guy had not taken any fancy to this young man whom Bertie had chosen for his friend, and had declined to join the tour which they were making during the short vacation. He was sorry afterwards that he had not sacrificed his own personal feelings in the matter, for the tour began and ended in a visit to Monaco and the gaming-tables.

There were constant requests for money in the brief letters that came to him from his brother at Oxford, requests that were always liberally answered, but though now and then he sent a few words of warning and advice, Guy shrunk from asking questions or seeming to be a spy upon his brother's actions. There was nothing he dreaded more than that Bertie should think he made the pecuniary assistance he was able to give him a pretext for lecturing, for Lawrence had the greatest dislike to play the part of Mentor to any one. He also trusted much to the tidings he received of Bertie through the letters of an old school friend, who was now dean of one of the colleges at Oxford.

From him he heard tolerably good accounts. Young Devrell was in the fast set, fond of horses, and kept more than most young men at college, but beyond that the Dean, who was not of the same college, or behind the scenes, knew little harm of him, and Lawrence was forced to be content; but he was never without the fear that evil tidings might come.

Of Celia Ragoni, Lawrence had heard very little; he had never seen her since that day when they had met at Laburnum Villa. All communications or arrangements about her change of residence had been made through Mrs. Morgan, and only a brief letter of thanks had come to Lawrence from the girl herself before he left England. She had seemed to shun the sight of him, and he on his part had not sought to see her, and since he had been at Rome she had merely acknowledged the

receipt of a cheque he had sent her, and thanking him for it, had expressed herself content with her new manner of life, and never hinted at any wish for a change.

But Lawrence often thought of her anxiously enough, for it seemed to him there was no hope for a woman so vain, so ambitious, and so beautiful.

Wonderfully beautiful she was indeed! Her face, with its enthralling, sensuous brilliance, would come before him still, and sometimes when he was painting, without his will, the face that he was imagining and trying to depict with a beauty absolutely distinct from hers would grow like the face of Celia Ragoni.

In vain Guy, disgusted with his own failure, would turn the picture with its face to the wall; it seemed to have a fascination for him which forced him to take it up, and, placing it on the easel, gaze at it with a sort of dread and a half superstitious feeling that the woman whose beauty he had painted against his will would in some way haunt him—would in some way be connected with the future, overshadowing it more darkly still.

CHAPTER IX.

IN a warm evening towards the end of the month of March, Bertie Deverell and his set—a select number of young men of a sporting tendency—were together in his rooms at Oxford, smoking and drinking and playing at cards.

One or two of them, with their half-tipsy, rakish looks, would have seemed more in place in the tap-room of a public-house, for the rooms (the atmosphere of which was stifling with the fumes of tobacco and the smell of brandy) were fitted up with every costly luxury.

Velvet lounges of every sort and shape were scattered about;

specimens of rare old china, Palissy and the like, stood on marqueterie tables; mirrors, extravagant with gilding, and pictures, some of them bijoux by some well-known artists, hung on the delicately tinted walls, and in juxtaposition with rough sketches of actresses and race-horses. It was a strange medley. There were foils and silver-mounted pistols, swords, guns, spurs and whips of all kinds; and there were statuettes in marble, carvings of exquisite design and richest workmanship. There were claret-jugs and silver drinking-cups, Sèvres tobacco-jars, cigar-stands, pipes of all kinds, meerschaums in every stage of coloring, briar-roots, hookahs and chibouques, race-glasses, French novels with yellow covers, and torn copies of sporting papers; and these were all hustled together in admired confusion, whilst in a corner far out of sight, a number of books, evidently not in requisition, were piled together on the floor.

There were five men in the room: one, leaning back on luxurious cushions, was lazily watching through half-closed eyes the little wreaths of smoke, as they ascended from the dainty cigarette he held between his strong, white fingers. He had long, sleepy eyes, a fair, drooping mustache, and a weak mouth with some defect in it which made it seem as if it would never shut, and in combination with a rather low forehead, caused one to doubt whether the intellect of the man was in proportion to his size—six foot three, and looking it every inch as he lay there stretched out on the velvet cushions.

But the sleepy eyes took note of something more than smoke, for all their languor.

"Devilish near thing that, Deverell," he drawled out.

He was watching a game of écarté, and the players were Bertie Deverell and Harvey Pearce, a man with a broad, low forehead, small, deep-set eyes, and massive jaws—a cross between a bull-terrier and a prize-fighter. His was not a pleasant face to look upon, or one that made you feel inclined to trust its owner. Harvey Pearce was the hardest drinker and the hardest rider then at Oxford—a horse-dealer spoilt. He was smoking a short pipe, taking deep draughts between the deals from

a tumbler of brandy-and-soda that stood near him, and playing his cards with a face unmoved by any changes of luck ; only now and then lifting his little sharp eyes to his opponent.

"Your deal, Pearce," said Bertie, pouring some champagne into a tumbler and draining the glass with eager thirst. Bertie Deverell was terribly altered. The bright freshness of his face was utterly gone. His haggard, bloodshot eyes, with deep black marks underneath them, pallid cheeks, parched, feverish lips, and trembling hands, all told unmistakable tales of hard living, late hours, and dissipation. The innocent fearlessness, the bright youthfulness, which had once made Bertie Deverell's face such a lovable one, had given place to a reckless, devil-may-care *insouciance*.

He was handsome enough still, with his delicate chiselled features, the stamp of high-breeding and gentle birth not yet effaced from them ; handsomer, perhaps, in the eyes of women, who cannot admire a face, however beautiful, which has not a story written on it, than in his first youth, or than he had been six or seven months ago : but it was a beauty of another sort—not the beauty of honesty and freshness.

Two other men watched the game—men I call them by courtesy, for one was a mere youth, a nobleman by birth, though there was nothing very noble about his appearance.

Lord Leath looked as if he had been washed in very strong soda and water and all the color taken out of him. He had light hair, light eyes, with an eye-glass stuck in one of them, light drab complexion, and very light mustaches and whiskers, just visible in a very strong side light. He was very weak in the legs, very weak in intellect, and very much impressed with his own acuteness in turf matters.

His dress was flash in the extreme. Shirts of large patterns, a preponderance of horseshoes wherever they could by possibility be introduced, very tight trousers, and very close-cropped smoothed-down hair, produced the desired effect, and Lord Leath was often mistaken for his own groom. It was an old joke among his friends, and one on which he rather prided

himself, that, riding one morning at an unusually early hour into Rotten Row, he had been peremptorily ordered out by the park-keeper and told that "grooms weren't allowed to hair their 'osses in the Row."

The other was a sharp, wiry little man, with a cunning, satirical face and two redeeming qualities—one, his intense admiration and affection for Bertie Deverell; the other, his pluckiness and staying powers across country. However badly he might be mounted, you might be sure Harry Lawson, by hook or by crook, would be in at the death, unless he killed himself or his horse by the way.

They were all "horsey men," these friends of Bertie Deverell, from Bob Bentham, who lay with his long legs stretched out on the sofa, to the weak little lord who was bending over Pearce's shoulder and betting eagerly on the game.

"Five to one on Pearce," he lisped out. "It's all up with you, Bertie, my boy. Unlucky at cards, you know—eh?"

"Done," growled Lawson; "and hold your jaw. How can a fellow play while you're talking such infernal nonsense?"

Lord Leath turned the eye with the glass in it in weak astonishment on the speaker.

"My dear fellow—weally you should be—aw—a little more moderate in—"

"Hold your tongue!" roared Lawson. And the other, with a few "Weally you knows," subsided into quiescence and dumbness. The game proceeded in silence, and for a few minutes there were no sounds but the shuffling of the cards and the puffing of cigars and pipes.

"King!" said Pearce.

"Hang the king!" said Bertie.

"High treason," drawled Bob Bentham. "You might have played that last hand better, Bertie, my boy."

"Impossible, my dear fellow. Shuffle the cards, Pearce. The luck's dead against me to-night."

And again there was silence.

"Game!" said Pearce, turning up another king, and darting

one triumphant look from under his heavy eyebrows at the loser.

"Confound the cards!" said Lawson, who had been backing Bertie throughout the game. "Fortune's a lady without much taste; she seems to bestow her favors on Pearce."

"Thanks for the compliment," said Pearce.

"That's thirty-five pounds to you, Pearce. Haven't any ready—I was cleared out last night—so you must take paper;" and scrawling an I O U for the amount, Bertie tossed it across the table and turned to light a cigarette.

"It's to be hoped your luck will turn, old fellow, before the race, or things will begin to look devilish queer for you and me too," said Lawson.

"Don't growl, *mon ami*," said Bertie, carelessly. "If you are beginning to funk, you can hedge, you know."

"Not a bad idea! I wonder who'll take him? Two to one against Rattlesnake. Will you, Pearce?" said Bob Bentham, with a queer look in his long, sleepy eyes. Something in the look or the tone seemed to irritate Harvey Pearce.

"My book is made," he answered sullenly.

"And I'll not hedge a penny," shouted Lawson, disregarding the by-play. "I stand to win or lose with Bertie."

"All right, old fellow," answered Bertie, with his old careless laugh. "He's as safe as the Bank."

"With you up, perhaps," said Bentham; "but that horse has a devilish queer temper, and if anything were to prevent your riding, Bertie, I'd not give a brass farthing for his chance."

"There isn't a fellow in college could ride Rattlesnake but you, Deverell; it's splendid, by Jove! to see you on him," put in little Lord Leath. "It's wonderful—terrible the way that horse pulls, I assure you—'pon my honor, you know—I got on him once, wasn't on more than five minutes, and he didn't give me the trouble to get off; both arms, pulled out of their sockets, ached for hours after, not to speak of bruises—yes, 'pon my word—you know."

"He wants a good deal of riding, but he's easy enough when you're used to him," said Bertie.

"Best horse I've come across for a long time," said Bentham; "he'll want careful handling, and then I hope he'll pull us through. By Jove! I shall be sold if he doesn't; and you too, Bertie. You've been losing heavily at cards, if I'm not mistaken. My boy, you'll excuse my interference, but I've been watching your play, and you're scarcely a match for Pearce; not so cool, less experience, and all that, you know."

Bertie flushed, for he piqued himself on playing a good game.

"A fellow can't contend against such luck as I had to-night," he said, rather angrily. And he turned to the table, and filling a glass half full of brandy, added a few drops of water, and drank it at a draught. It seemed as if his thirst was insatiable.

Bentham watched him.

"Draw it mild," he said, as Bertie put down the empty glass. "You're not going the way to win, my dear fellow. It's impossible to ride when you've been liquoring hard the night before. Unsteadies your hand, makes you seedy, and takes away your pluck. Things will look awfully fishy for us if your hand shakes on the morning of the race as it does now."

"All right; don't you trouble yourself. There's a whole day and night to pick up in."

"Well, it's your own look-out," replied Bentham, knocking the ash from his cigarette into a delicate porcelain dish. "You stand to win or lose too much on this venture to run any risk through want of resolution to stop your liquor for a day or so."

"Not much fear. A little brandy never did any one any harm," said Pearce, who had been puffing away in silence.

"Not much fear for you, perhaps, Pearce," retorted Bentham. "You're devilish close about your affairs, but, according to all accounts, you've not backed Rattlesnake—rather the contrary."

"Well," answered Pearce, with a swift glance of his small

eyes, "I've not got much on the race, it's true—only a trifle; but I can't afford to bet as heavily as some of you."

"Indeed!" said Bentham. The tone was almost insolent in its incredulity, but for some reason best known to himself Pearce did not resent it. Perhaps he did not care to provoke a quarrel which would involve plain speaking, or throw any light on his affairs just at that time.

"By Jove!" said Percy Leath, speaking under difficulties, with a huge regalia in his small mouth. "Rattlesnake will carry us through—see if he don't. Back Deverell, by gad!—best rider ever saw."

"I know a better," said Bertie quietly.

"Who?" asked Lawson, who for some time had watched Bertie with a troubled countenance. His suspicions roused by Bentham's words, he could not fail to note in him terrible signs of weakened health and nerve, induced by fast living.

"My brother—Lawrence—capital fellow he is: rather slow, but he has the best seat, lightest hand, and the coolest dare-devil pluck of any man I know."

"Very pretty, fraternal affection," sneered Pearce. Bertie darted an angry glance at him.

"How goes the enemy?" interrupted Bentham, taking out his watch. "Who's there? Hope you sported your oak, Deverell. I'll bet that's one of the Masters or Deans coming to pay you a visit. Always poking their infernal old noses where they are least wanted."

Bertie went to the door.

"Open the door, Bertie," said a voice outside.

"By George! it's Guy. Talk of the —— Come in, old fellow; how the deuce did you turn up?"

And Guy Lawrence, with his sun-browned, healthy face and genial smile, came into the room and shook his brother warmly by the hand.

There was a slight awkwardness for a short time. The newcomer was so clearly not one of them, that Bertie's companions felt a certain restraint in his presence. But Guy was for once

determined to make himself agreeable, and it wore off. He joined them in smoking and talking and drinking, and before half an hour had passed they would all four have agreed in voting him "a devilish good fellow."

It was not possible for these men, whose thoughts were all engrossed with the steeple-chase which was to be run the day after the morrow, to keep the subject out of their talk; and Guy soon picked up from the not very lucid descriptions which they were all eager to give, all there was to learn.

Such disjointed phrases as "thundering good horse;" "Aylesbury steeple-chase;" "crack riders;" "bought him of old Toms, the dealer;" "splendid condition;" "stiff post and rails;" "first-class jumper;" "safe to win;" "lumped it on;" put together, gave him a fair idea of the real state of things.

Lawrence volunteered no opinion on the subject either way. He only with his watchful eyes took note of the change in Bertie, and there was scarcely a look or a word that could give him any insight into the characters of the men who were with him, that escaped his observation; but most of all his eye lingered on Harvey Pearce.

A little later they all rose to go; but Lawrence remained.

"Turn in, Bertie, and get some beauty sleep," was Lawson's parting injunction.

"Have another weed, Guy. Where do you put up?" said Bertie.

"Thanks. Hard by—at the Mitre. How are you, my boy? I've not had time to inquire—all right?"

"Right enough," replied Bertie; "but where did you come from?"

"I was tired of my own company, so I thought I'd give you a look-up. By the bye, what's this about the steeple-chase? What put it into your head to ride? I didn't know you went in for that sort of thing."

"Too much trouble, generally," answered Bertie, with a yawn, "but you see I bought this horse of old Toms. I wanted one, and he was going deuced cheap. And then some of the

fellows got their eye upon him, and wanted me to enter him at Aylesbury and ride him myself. They generally send two Oxford men."

"And you've backed him very heavily?" asked Guy.

Bertie turned round impatiently. "That's the worst of being dependent. It gives people a right to pry into your concerns," he said, angrily.

"Nonsense," said Guy; "isn't that a question any man may ask of another? and I only asked for your own sake—because—"

"Because what?"

"Because I don't think you'll win."

"And why the devil don't you think so?"

Guy looked at Bertie, and made no answer for a moment. Then he laid his hand kindly on his brother's shoulder.

"Do you think you're in good condition for riding, Bertie?" he asked, quietly; "you've not been living the sort of life that fits a fellow for that kind of thing. How will you be to-morrow morning, for instance? A night of drinking and smoking in a room close as this isn't the best way to make a man's hand steady—or his nerve either."

"There's lots of time to pick up before the race," said Bertie, sullenly.

"A day and a night—for this is nearly gone. Well, it's no good saying any more. If you can't get out of it you must make the best of it; but I tell you plainly, I wouldn't give much for your chance."

"It's just the way to encourage a fellow and give him confidence (which is half the battle), to croak like that, isn't it? Shan't I win? You'll see. A pretty thing to sell all the men who have backed me!"

"Have they all backed you—those men who were here to-night?" asked Guy. "That man Pearce, for instance, has he got much on the race?"

"Well, I don't know—only a trifle; I believe he's hard up, can't afford to bet heavily—at least, he says so," added Bertie,

thinking of the many round sums he had lost to him at écarté.

"Ah! had he anything to do with your buying this horse?"

"He went over with me to see him, and recommended me to buy him. Deuced good judge of horse-flesh is Harvey Pearce—can't take him in," said Bertie, twisting his little golden mustache.

"No, I should think not; rather the other way, Bertie," said Guy. "Unless I make a great mistake, that man stands to win on your failure. I watched him to-night, and every glass of brandy that you took he felt himself nearer to success."

"Good heavens, Guy! What do you know about it? You're wonderfully clever, no doubt; but it so happens that Pearce bets very little—if at all—on any race."

"Doesn't he? Well, you know, a looker-on sees more of the game, and I came fresh amongst you. But I'm quite ready to own myself mistaken when I find that I am. Good-night, Bertie. Turn in; I won't keep you up any longer. I'll look you up in the morning." And then the brothers separated, and Guy Lawrence wended his solitary way to the hotel.

The next morning Bertie Deverell did not appear either at chapel or lecture; but his absence was such a usual occurrence that it excited no remark.

Guy Lawrence, coming into his rooms about eleven o'clock, found him sitting, attired in a gorgeous dressing-gown, shivering over a roaring fire, though the morning was wonderfully warm for the time of year.

"Got the ague, or something," he said, ruefully, as he shook hands with Guy.

"You do look awfully seedy, to be sure," said Lawson, who had popped in, as he explained, in an interval of hard study, to see what had become of his friend. "Don't let it get wind, or they'll be funky about the race."

"D—the race!" exclaimed Bertie. "Leave me alone: I shall be all right. It's that confounded wetting I got the other day by the water."

And so Lawson departed with a long face, and Guy was left to administer what consolation he could under the circumstances.

"Leave the brandy alone, Bertie," he said, as his brother took up a bottle with a shaky hand. "That won't set you right. I'll go for a doctor."

"No, you shan't. I won't have that nasty croaking old Sawbones come pottering about me," said Bertie.

"You'd better let me go," answered Guy; "it's your only chance."

"Put down the blind, will you? I can't bear that horrid sun in my eyes," said Bertie, irritably. What an altered face it was, with blanched cheeks and haggard restlessness on every feature! As the sun rested on it the few faint rays were almost unbearable to the bloodshot eyes that had once been able to meet the brightest glare, but which were now scarcely able to discern the figures in the betting-book.

"I say, Guy," Bertie said at last, breaking the silence that had fallen upon them—for Lawrence felt almost too depressed to take the pains to hide the shock which the alteration in his brother caused him—"If you think it will be any good, I'll see a doctor. It—it's awfully hard lines, you know, to fall ill just at this time, with all the fellows backing me; and did you know that confounded old nuisance, Captain Lorton, has come over for the steeple-chase and brought Kitty with him? She's to be there, and she's going to wear my colors. It will be hard to fail. I shall hide my face forever if I break down. They'll say I funk'd."

"Kitty Lorton here!" exclaimed Guy.

"Not here. At a farm-house a few miles from Oxford. He did have the sense not to bring her into the town for all the fellows to stare at. But of all the idiotic, senseless things for a man to do—to bring a girl to a steeple-chase of this sort. I'd rather, Guy—I'd rather shoot myself than let any of them—my friends, you know—have the least idea that I had anything to do with that disreputable old ruffian. He came pottering

here one day, and I promised anything to get rid of him. So the next day I went over to see Kitty. She had the sense to know the whole thing was a mistake. There is an old lady with her to play respectability, and stay with Kitty at the race—I suppose when Captain Lorton is in the ring—a disreputable old beggar!—aunt, or cousin, or something of Lorton's. Hang the whole concern. I wish the old cad had been strangled before he came here."

"I suppose you don't include Miss Lorton in your vituperations—you're not ashamed of her?" said Guy, sternly.

"No, but she ought to have known better than to come. I wouldn't have the fellows here know of my engagement for the world—they'd never stop chaffing; and the daughter of that horrible old snob, too."

Guy looked at his brother with something very like scorn as he thought how little he should have been ashamed of Kitty Lorton if she had been engaged to him.

It was true enough that it was a great mistake for her to come here. But no doubt she had not been able to help it. So thought Guy, and he was very near the facts of the case.

Captain Lorton, to whom every race or steeple-chase was as a loadstone and he the steel that was drawn to it, had made up his mind to come to Aylesbury, and thought to combine two things—the looking up of Mr. Bertie, who, in his opinion, had been rather amiss in his letters and attentions to Kitty, and the hope of sport.

Moreover, on the principle that there are as good fish in the sea as have ever come out of it, he thought that Kitty's presence on the scene would not only influence her present lover's cooling ardor, but might gain her others among Bertie's grand college friends, to whom he would probably introduce her.

But it seemed that Captain Lorton's calculations were wrong there, for Bertie not only resented his fiancée's appearance in the vicinity of Oxford, but showed no intention of bringing her forward in any way.

As for Kitty, her life was absolutely stagnant at Erlesmere,

and she had given way out of sheer weariness of soul, caring too little about Bertie to think whether he would be pleased to see her or not. If she had seen any symptoms of displeasure at her presence in his manner during the few minutes he had favored her with a visit when he rode over from Oxford, she would have been quick enough to resent it—glad enough, perhaps, of an excuse for breaking her engagement. But Kitty had seen nothing of the sort. For the short time Bertie had been with her, he had been lover-like enough to satisfy the most exigeante, and had forgotten all his vexation in the presence of the girl he did really love, in his own way.

"If you wouldn't have the fellows know of your engagement for the world, I wonder you like Miss Lorton to wear your colors," said Guy, with an uncontrollable sneer.

It was hard that the girl whom he had given up at such bitter cost to himself should be spoken of with anything like disrespect.

"There'll be plenty to wear my colors, I dare say," answered Bertie, with a half smile. "She won't be the only one."

And then Guy went out to search for a doctor, and left Bertie to his own reflections—not pleasing ones, to judge by the expression of his face.

"They'll say I funk'd," he muttered once between his closed teeth, "and I'm ruined unless the horse runs."

Towards evening Bertie picked up, and all his hopes revived.

The same men who had met at his rooms the previous evening, met there again, but the drinking was more moderate, and there was scarcely any play going on; all interest was centred in the race; that alone was the topic discussed, and whatever fears Bertie's friends and backers might have on the subject they kept them to themselves.

No one appeared to have any doubt that violet-and-white would show first past the post.

They separated earlier than usual, and Guy left Bertie when

the others did; a great fear possessed him that his brother was more ill than he chose to acknowledge, and that he would not be able to ride on the morrow.

Continued dissipation had undermined Bertie's strength, and a neglected cold, caused by a thorough wetting, had turned to a sort of ague. Hot and cold fits succeeded each other, and left him weak and debilitated. What hope was there that he could ride a horse, which, according to all accounts, required much management?

Guy Lawrence was so anxious that he could not sleep, and before dawn he found his way to his brother's room. Having with difficulty awakened the slumbering gyp, he stole noiselessly into the sitting-room, but he found the door which communicated with the bedroom thrown wide open, and looking in saw Bertie lying on the bed half dressed.

"Guy, I was coming to you," he said, half raising his head, and looking at his brother in a strange, bewildered way, "but I couldn't get dressed—there—there's something the matter with me—and there's the race, you know. If I don't ride, I'm ruined—ruined, Guy; do something, don't stand staring, for pity's sake—get the doctor."

"I'll go for the doctor, Bertie," answered Guy, kindly. "Get into bed—it's no good bothering yourself about the race. You must give it up—you're not fit to ride."

"Give it up! good Heavens, are you mad?" shouted Bertie, raising himself and glaring fiercely at his brother; "would you ruin me, would you have me sell all the fellows who have backed me? Here, give me the toggery—hurrah for the violet-and-white? who says I can't win? Rattlesnake forever!" and his eyes flashed with the unnatural lustre of fever, as he raved rather than uttered these incoherent words.

"Lie down," said Guy, in a calm tone. "It isn't time to dress yet, even if you ride and—it's no use deceiving you, Bertie—you can't do it. If you were to attempt to mount a horse you would fall off. You can't stand, much less ride."

"Give me some brandy—brandy will pick me up."

"You shan't have it. You are killing yourself, Bertie," answered Guy, who saw that the fever was making him more and more incoherent. "Listen to me. Don't you know any man who can take your place?"

"There's not a fellow in Oxford who could do it. Don't think of thwarting me. I'm bound to ride, and by Heaven I will if I can hold the reins."

"Be quiet, old fellow—" began Guy, soothingly.

"If the horse is scratched, I'm ruined. You don't know, Guy. I was sure of winning; it's all this cursed ague."

The fever was passing now, and the shivering fit which rendered Bertie yet more utterly prostrate, was coming on.

He sank back on the bed, and gradually his eyes began to close, the muttering ceased, and he fell into a heavy sleep.

Guy stole gently to the window and drew down the blind, for the first streaks of early sunlight were falling across the bed and on the haggard face of the sleeper.

The morning of the long-talked-of race had dawned, but Bertie lay there deprived of the strength wherein he had boasted, and Guy Lawrence stood by the bedside looking down on him with a sorrowful face.

The bright, handsome boy, his mother's darling, lay there so changed and helpless; and he who had promised him help and succor in all time of need, what could he do now? He remained there for a few minutes, in silence and deep thought, and then he turned away with a heavy sigh, and crept noiselessly from the room.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Bertie woke in the morning he seemed so much refreshed and so far recovered that he refused peremptorily to listen to Guy's entreaties that he should give up all idea of riding, and insisted upon setting off for Aylesbury at once.

Guy, finding further remonstrance useless, held his peace, only suggesting that he should accompany Bertie.

They arrived there in ample time for the "Undergraduates' Plate." A fly took them to the course, where their appearance was hailed by vociferous demonstrations from Bertie's sanguine partisans, who crowded round the champion about to do battle for their Alma Mater. Bertie struggled, with the innate pluck of his race, to appear calm and confident, but though he assured them that it was "just a walk over, you know—simply a moral," his anxious, flushed face belied his words, and caused many and sore misgivings amongst those who knew the cause.

"But how's the nerve, Bertie?" asked Bentham, seriously. "Ah, don't grow impatient, old man; it isn't pluck that I mean—no fear of your showing the feather—but you've got ticklish work cut out for you to-day: not merely sticking on, like a monkey in a circus, but work for a firm wrist, and what's more, a cool head. Now, you know—"

"Well, old chap, cut it short," interrupted Bertie, impatiently; "what *are* you driving at?"

"Nothing much, Bertie; only I don't think your style of training is good—that's all."

"You don't, eh? All right, we'll put you up next year and feed you with a bottle and pap-boat."

Beyond raising his eyebrows languidly, the laugh that greeted this speech had little effect upon Bentham's calm, immovable temper.

"Come, cut preaching," drawled Leath, sucking at a huge

regalia. "'Pon my honor, you know, it's rather good for you to give Deverell riding-lessons."

"Don't speak with your mouth full, but stick to your weed, little 'un," replied Bentham, in a slightly sarcastic tone; "it's about as much as you can manage—without being sick."

Leath stuck his glass in his eye, gazed at Bentham for a few seconds, and then quietly subsided.

"By Jove, though, Bentham's just right," remarked Lawson, who had joined the group a minute or two previously. "You look seedy, Bertie—most awful seedy; hardly in form to take it out of that devil Rattlesnake."

"Only a slight headache, my prince of croakers," replied Bertie; "barring that, I was never fitter!"

"Headache or not, you haven't an ounce to give away, I can tell you. There's Billy Thornhill from Trinity going to ride for Cambridge, and he'll take a deal of beating you may take your oath, even if he rides a clothes-horse, which he won't."

"What sort of a thing is this Satanella that he rides?" asked Bertie.

"The most dangerous-looking black mare I've set eyes on for some time; belongs to a man called Newcombe."

"Newcombe?" asked Guy, who to this time had been anxiously watching Bertie. "Any relation to the Newcombe who owned Rigoletto?"

"Son, I believe," said Lawson, who had also been ruefully regarding Bertie's altered appearance.

"Stable companion of a St. Leger winner," added Guy, seriously. "She'll be likely to turn out dangerous."

"Not a doubt of it," said Bentham; "she's in the paddock, come and have a look at her, Bertie."

"All right," replied Bertie, with a careless laugh. "I shan't have a chance during the race, unless I look behind me. Gee-up, old man—come along, Guy."

Guy was about to follow them, when he espied in the crowd an old college chum, who, though he had left Oxford ten years

before, never failed to be present at any gathering of the 'varieties, on river, race-course, or cricket-ground.

"Excuse me, Bertie; there's Mugford. I haven't seen him for years. I'll wait here—see you when you come back."

Guy was striding through the crowd towards Mugford while the others went on their quest for the dreaded black mare, when suddenly a hand thrust out from a group of betting men seized him and he found himself confronted by Captain Lorton. So utterly changed, so repugnantly dissolute, so fearfully degraded, had he become since their last meeting, that Guy involuntarily withdrew his hand and shrank from him with a gesture of disgust; but trifles such as these were little likely to affect the sensitiveness of the Captain, whose skin had become tolerably hardened by constant rubs with the world.

"Hullo, Lawrence, my boy—you here?" he cried in a familiar tone that was peculiarly offensive. "Why, curse me if it ain't quite a family gathering—fancy us all turning up! I've got Kitty here somewhere—come to see Bertie win, you know. Where the deuce has she got to? Oh, there she is. Here, Kitty, here's your future brother-in-law."

Hiding the annoyance that the man's manner caused him, Guy turned his head hastily to where Kitty was standing, attended by a coarse, gaudily-dressed, common-looking woman.

His face flushed crimson as he saw her amidst such a gathering, and heard the comments that her presence elicited from the crowd.

Very pretty she looked in Bertie's colors, violet dress and cape edged with delicate white fur, and tiny bonnet, with white lace trimmings to match, perched on her chestnut hair. Her cheeks were bright with excitement, and her eyes were sparkling with animation at the strangeness of the scene; with something more—with anger and scorn, for she had seen Guy Lawrence before he had seen her, and had noticed how he had shrunk from her father's vulgar greeting. Her lips curled with disdain as she coldly extended her small, daintily gloved hand to him.

"I scarcely expected to meet you in such society, Mr. Lawrence. Don't you fear the contamination?"

"If you can go through the ordeal, Miss Lorton, I am likely to pass unscathed. Don't you think so?" he answered, quietly.

"Oh, I'm learning to bear these things. Constant rubs with the world make one thick-skinned, you know. A rudeness even almost fails—"

"A rudeness?" exclaimed Guy, in a surprised tone, "who would dare to show you rudeness?"

Her eyes flashed scornfully, and she was about to reply, when a hand was laid on Guy's shoulder and a cheery voice behind him exclaimed, "Hullo, Lawrence! saw you engaged, but couldn't risk losing you. How are you, old fellow? Fancy seeing you here! Don't know why I shouldn't, all the same. Do you know Beresford?" he continued, alluding to a fast, roughish-looking man who accompanied him. "Why, of course; you were up at Oxford together; same college too, now I think of it."

"I knew Mr. Beresford then," said Guy, with an emphasis on the last word, as he bowed slightly, "but we haven't met since."

"More's the pity, Lawrence, if you are generally so favored," replied Beresford, with a cool, insolent stare at Kitty. "Won't you introduce us?"

Instead of replying, Guy turned to Kitty, his face flushed with annoyance.

"Here is your father, Miss Lorton. I must go and look after Bertie. Good-by." He held out his hand, but she, instead of taking it, bowed to him with frigid hauteur, and turned away.

Mugford saw that Beresford's company was a restraint upon Guy, and so seized the first opportunity to shake him off.

"What's up between-you and Beresford?" he asked. "I thought you used to know him."

"So I did," answered Guy, "until I caught him rooking poor little Georgie Fielding at billiards—but that's too long a story to tell you now. Let's go and see this horse of Bertie's;

it's kept at a farm-house half a mile from here. Do you mind coming with me?"

"Not the least, if you'll carry me when I'm tired."

"This Rattlesnake seems to be fancied. Do you know anything of him?" asked Guy.

"Nothing whatever," replied Mugford, "except that he is described as having the speed of a race-horse with the temper of a devil. But your brother is a good rider, of course?"

"I scarcely know a better—rather rash perhaps, but a perfect horseman."

"Well, if he's anything like yourself he'll do. Do you do anything in that way now? By Jove! it seems only yesterday that you cut down the Pytchley field. Don't you remember? that day we found at Cottesbrook Spinnies, thirteen miles in fifty-eight minutes; only three at the finish; yourself a good first. Fastest thing I was ever in."

"Yes, I remember it well," said Guy, with a smile of pleasure at the reminiscence.

"And that day at Brampton Wood when you pounded us in old Wurzle's field? Gad, Lawrence, my blood ran cold when I saw you go at that leap—a six-foot ditch with an oxer, hard as iron, staked and bound, into a lane not eighteen feet wide, and the same thing on the other side. Don't you remember it? But you did it and got away. Teddy Holmes tried it and it cost him a two-hundred-guinea horse and a broken collar-bone. Are you up to the old form now?"

"Well, I scarcely know. I was only a youngster then—so full of my horsemanship that I forgot my horse. I should know better now."

By this time they had reached the farm. In the yard they saw, leaning against the stable door, a groom, who touched his cap as they approached.

Guy immediately recognized him as having been in service at Erlesmere, before Bertie left for college.

"You here, Saunders?" he said, entering the stable; "I want to see Mr. Bertie's horse."

"All right, sir, he's here all safe and sound. Take care, sir—don't get too near his 'eels; he's got a nasty way of letting out, and he ain't in the werry best of tempers this morning."

Guy scanned him attentively. He was splendidly formed: long-bodied, close-ribbed, full of blood and muscle, powerful loins, a great width of barrel, a small racing-like head, and strong, clean, short legs. He looked thoroughbred all over; but with all this he had a nasty roll of the eye and a way of throwing his ears back at the slightest sound that unmistakably showed the lurking devilry in him.

"What do you think of him, Saunders!" asked Guy, after he had surveyed him a few minutes.

"Barring accidents, sir, he'll win—there's only two horses beside him in the race: Tom Tit, a gray that's a good fencer, I hear, but can't never stay a three-and-a-half mile course; the other is Mr. Newcombe's mare, Satanella. She's a clinker, there ain't no two ways about that, and won't make a bad fight of it; but if Rattlesnake don't go into her tantrums she can show 'em all a clean pair of 'eels."

"Well, you won't come to grief for want of condition, Saunders."

"Nor for want of proper handling, Mr. Guy. As I said before, barring temper, sir, we'll about pull through."

"We shall see," said Guy, going out of the stable. "Come, Mugford, let's go and look up Bertie. By the bye, Saunders, don't bring the horse down till the last moment—you say he's not over amiable to-day, and the crowd might frighten him."

"All right, sir."

When Guy and Mugford reached the ring they found Bertie still the centre of an admiring crowd. Some, who had stood his horse, looked anxious at his excited, flushed appearance; whilst others declared vehemently that it was "the greatest moral going"—that nothing in the world could prevent him from winning.

Amongst the latter was Lawson, who looked daggers at any

one who questioned Bertie's infallibility, and was ready to do battle then and there on behalf of his chosen idol.

"You talk as if you knew all about it," he said, in a tone of contemptuous pity, to a man who expressed a doubt as to Bertie's coolness. "Why, I flatter myself I can ride a little, but I just *don't* ride, that's the difference; I only push my horse along, put him at his fences and we blunder over—as likely to come to grief, as far as judgment goes; and that's the case with most of us. But that isn't riding. Look at Deverell now: he knows to a nicety what a horse can do; he can tell to an inch how much jump is left in him, and if it's there, by gad, he'll get it out of him. That's my idea of horsemanship. *You* prate of coolness—he hasn't enough to teach his grandmother to suck eggs, as you do. Go back to Hampstead Heath, Moffit, my innocent, and learn a little more, for that's your riding-school, I should imagine."

At this moment Pearce approached. As he scanned Bertie, a look of satisfaction spread over his face.

"Hullo, you fellows!" he said; "let's have a look at our gentleman jock. You're like a hungry pack—by Jove, they'll eat you, Deverell, if you don't whip 'em off."

"Not such hungry curs as to fatten on our friends," said Bentham, pointedly.

Pearce cast a savage look at him.

"No," he sneered, "you're more like jackals: Deverell's the lion that's to have the pickings. You're only waiting for your share of what he leaves."

"Well, I suppose you're in the swim—aren't you, Pearce?" said Lawson. "You've backed Bertie's mount, of course?"

"Rumor says not," observed Bentham, coolly.

"Rumor's always an awful liar," said Pearce, with a somewhat constrained laugh, as he turned on his heel. "Never believe her, old fellow."

Bentham followed him with a look till he was lost in the crowd. "If that fellow isn't a scoundrel," thought he, "his looks don't do him justice."

Meanwhile, Pearce plunged into the betting ring, and after looking about him for a few moments, walked up to a bullet-headed, bull-necked individual attired in a dirty white scarf, fox-head pin, a cutaway horsey-looking coat, and tight trousers; who, a placard on his white hat informed the world, was "Bob Smithers, of Manchester;" a small book and pencil which he held bespeaking him a betting man. As Pearce approached he was shouting frantically, "Six to four on the field! six to four I'll lay. Two to one, bar one. What'll you back, Captin?"

"What are you making favorite?" asked Pearce.

"Rattlesnake—six to four."

"What are your odds about Satanella?"

"Two to one."

"I'll take four ponies to two."

"All right, sir," replied Mr. Smithers, busy with his pencil. "Again?"

"Once will be enough, thank you," answered Pearce. Then as he turned away, entering the bet in his betting-book, he cast his eye down the row of figures.

"How do you stand, Pearce?" asked a rakish, dissipated-looking man, dressed in a very shiny flat-brimmed hat, which he wore on one side, a loose double-seamed driving coat and check trousers. "Have you peppered the Oxford crack pretty freely?"

"Yes, rather," replied Pearce, with a laugh. "I win two hundred and sixty pounds on the mare, and lose one hundred and eighty on Rattlesnake—not a bad look-out that, considering Deverell will drop off before he's gone a hundred yards, if he ever gets on. If you are right about Satanella, we shall do."

The excitement amongst the adherents of the two universities became more intense as the time for the race approached. Bertie's face flushed with the agony of his anxiety, his head swam with delirium, and he showed unmistakable signs of a rapid fever. Then, as the fear seized him that he might not have strength for the task before him, his excitement increased, his hand trembled, and his lip blanched.

All these changes were marked by Guy, who watched him anxiously, a sad look of pain overspreading his grave face.

"I've been over the course, Deverell," said a tall, manly-looking youth, who had just joined them; "there's an awkward double rather, before the run in; don't dream of flying it—it looks easy, but it's about impossible—Why, Bertie, old fellow, are you ill?" he exclaimed suddenly.

Every eye was turned anxiously on Bertie; who, in attempting to move a few paces had staggered, and would have fallen had not Guy supported him.

"It's nothing, nothing much, only a slight giddiness. Get me some brandy and soda, plenty of ice—quick!"

The consternation of the group was great at this critical state of things, but though most had betted heavy sums on Rattlesnake, but one feeling existed amongst them—one of concern for Bertie Deverell's health. "You can't ride, Bertie." "Give it up, old fellow." "It would be madness." Such remonstrances proceeded from all around directly they saw that he was really ill.

"Have you heard about that cad, Pearce?" cried Leath, running up.

"No—what?" from a chorus of voices.

"He's been betting against Rattlesnake; a man I know saw him do it in the ring—awfully low, you know, isn't it?"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when Pearce came up.

"Well, Deverell, are you better, old fellow?" said he, with a malicious gleam of the eye; "you don't seem quite the thing—perhaps the gallop will do you good."

The marked silence with which this speech was received showed Pearce that something was amiss.

"Why, what's the matter with you all?" he asked; "has the crack broken down?"

"You will be sorry to hear he was never fitter," answered Bentham. "Why, Pearce, what a Cræsus you must be to bet against him."

Pearce's face turned scarlet, but recovering himself, "That's just what I'm not," he said, with a forced laugh, determined to put the best face on the matter. "I've heard such wonderful things of Newcombe's mare, that I've just hedged a trifle to save my book."

"If you've any bets on Bertie you'd like to lay off," said Lawson, contemptuously—"we're not getting nervous, you know, Pearce—I'll take sixty pounds to forty if you like to lay it."

"No, no, old chap," said Bertie, in an undertone, catching him eagerly by the arm. "Do nothing of the sort; I'm awfully bad, much as I can do to stand. I see his game now—he's at the bottom of it all." Then to Pearce, "I hope you stand a good stake on my breakdown, Pearce?"

"I don't understand you—why should you hope so?" blustered Pearce, confusedly.

"Because nothing short of it would compensate a gentleman for turning blackleg."

"What do you mean?" roared Pearce, turning white as a sheet, whilst the commotion amongst the bystanders was great in the extreme.

"Hold your tongue, Bertie," whispered Guy; "are you insane?"

"My meaning is simple enough," went on Bertie, now perfectly maddened with the combined effects of rage and fever; "it's you who've brought me to this state—it was you who plied me with drink to win your cursed money. But you haven't succeeded yet, and if I can sit in my saddle, by God, you shan't!"

The excitement of this paroxysm was too great. His head reeled, his eyes grew dim, and he seized Guy's arm to support himself. At this moment the bell rang for the course to be cleared for the "Undergraduates' Plate." Some of the riders had weighed, and were already parading themselves before the stand.

"Come, Deverell," shouted one of Bertie's adherents, rush-

ing up breathless, "they're asking for you in the weighing-room. Look alive, old fellow—there's not much time to lose."

Loud and earnest were the remonstrances urged on all sides, but Bertie's natural stubbornness, aggravated by his conviction of Pearce's treachery, made him turn a deaf ear to them.

"You can't do it, Bertie," said Guy; "it's no use, young one, you are too ill—far too ill."

"Don't talk stuff!" returned Bertie, savagely. "Sell all the fellows, and be the laughing-stock of Oxford—I'll die first!"

Guy did not attempt to reply, but walked with him in silence to the weighing-room, accompanied by Lawson, Leath, Bentham, and five or six others.

"Now, Mr. Deverell," said the clerk of the course, "all weighed but you, sir."

"Off with my coat, Guy—steady—steady—Oh, Guy, hold me up! That cursed giddiness again," and he staggered as if he would have fallen.

"Bertie, listen to me," said Guy sternly, but in a tone unheard by the bystanders; "you shall not ride this race. I know the temper of the horse you were to ride; in your state it would be madness to attempt it—worse than madness, it would be suicide."

"It's three o'clock, Mr. Deverell," said the clerk of the course, looking at his watch, "time to be at the post."

Bertie turned from him to Guy, with a pitiable look of entreaty. "You know I've backed Rattlesnake for such a pot—a regular hatful, Guy."

"Would money repair a broken neck? Will money give you back your life?"

"And then Bentham, and Lawson, and all those fellows have stood Rattlesnake. If he doesn't run they lose a heap of money."

"He shall run," said Guy, calmly.

Bertie looked at him in surprise.

"But who's to ride him?"

"I will."

"You, Guy?" cried Bertie. "You! Oh, Guy, why did I never think of this before? You can win: you *will* win;" then turning to the others, "Here, Bentham, Lawson, it's all right; Guy's going to ride, and we'll pull it off, yet."

"Now, sir, if you're going to weigh," said one of the stewards, "be good enough to look sharp."

Great was the satisfaction with which Bertie's words were heard, for Guy's fame as a cross-country rider had gone before him amongst his brother's set.

"But what about leathers, Guy?" asked Bertie, with a blank look; "you couldn't get mine on."

"All right; I've provided for emergencies."

As he spoke he unbuttoned his overcoat, and taking off a pair of loose leggings displayed a very workmanlike get-up of breeches and boots.

"Now, then, Bertie, off with your jacket," he said, while Lawson and Leath arrayed him with a pair of cruel-looking hunting spurs that he had taken from his pocket. "That's it; now the cap."

And Guy stood before them in full racing costume, wearing Kitty Lorton's colors—violet and white: to do battle for them, to uphold them, for his brother's sake.

When Guy was slipping on his overcoat, after having gone through the form of weighing, he called Bentham aside.

"Take Bertie into the stand at once," he said, "and keep him as quiet as you can—he's very ill, and this excitement will make him much worse."

Just then, a stable-boy who was looking out for Guy, hurried up to him. "Please, sir, Saunders sent me to say as he's afeared the crowd might frighten Rattlesnake, so I've been and taken him a little way up the course."

"All right; show me where he is—quick."

In a few minutes they came up to Saunders, who was leading Rattlesnake ready saddled, his dark chestnut coat shining like satin, and looking all over the pink of condition.

"Well, Saunders," said Guy, "how's his temper now?"

"I'm blest if I quite know what to make of him, Mr. Guy, beggin' your pardon," replied Saunders, sticking his head on one side, and contemplating the object of their solicitude with a knowing look. "He's a rum devil, and no mistake; he wouldn't let me go near him an hour ago, and now he's that quiet an infant might manage him."

"So much the better," laughed Guy.

"I was werry glad when the boy came and told me as you was a-going to ride, sir, because Mr. Bertie, though werry clever, is a leetle bit hasty. Rattlesnake's all werry well just now, but I wouldn't trust him; I know his tricks. Above all, Mister Guy, don't use the whip if you can help it—he goes wild directly he feels it. I tried it once, and I wished I hadn't."

"He's a handsome brute," said Guy, scanning him closely.

"He's a rare good 'un—there's no mistake about it; goes like a greased flash o' lightning—strong as a cart-horse too. You're five pounds over weight, sir, I dare say, but that won't make any difference on his back, if you can only keep it there."

"You think we'll have a fight for it?" said Guy as he jumped into the saddle. "So, steady! All right then, one of us will get the worst of it—that's all. Give him his head."

"You know the course, sir, I suppose?" said Saunders, walking by his side; "there's one rather awkward jump, a five-foot ditch and a bullfinch—nothing out of the way particular, but a weiry nasty thing to blunder at. Besides that, a double post and rails before the run in, which ain't werry much neither, as there's plenty of room to pop in and out, except that the posts is rather stiffish. There ain't nothing else worth speaking of."

The others were already at the starting-post, so Guy gently shook the reins and cantered up, Rattlesnake going without the slightest show of temper. But this state of things was not to last long—it was only the calm before the coming storm.

Forming into something like a line, they walked towards

the starter. There were only four of them : Tom Tit, a good-looking gray with handsomely turned quarters, but rather light thighs, and knees too far from the ground ; Kate Mellon, a weedy bay mare with great want of girth, and, in fact, no great point, but a rather handsome head, well set on ; Satanella, the much-dreaded black mare, with a head and neck that were perfection, splendid barrel, but if anything, hocks a trifle too small for her size ; and last, but not least, Rattlesnake.

To start four runners in a three-and-a-half mile steeple-chase is no difficult matter. The flag was lowered and they were off.

They sailed away at a tolerably easy pace across the first field and over a low fence, Kate Mellon taking it slightly in advance, Rattlesnake a length behind everything, Guy having taken a pull at him to look at his opponents.

He saw at a glance that danger was only to be feared from Satanella, who had all the appearance of a splendid fencer.

Knowing the wonderful strength and staying power of Rattlesnake, he determined to force the running, so giving the chestnut his head, in a few strides shot in front. In this order they came to the water jump, which Kate Mellon refused, the others getting over without a mistake. The bay having declined three times, her rider retired from the race, now leaving only three to fight it out. Away they pounded, the splendid stride and pace of Rattlesnake beginning to tell upon the gray ; the black mare, however, keeping close upon the chestnut's haunches on the whip hand.

Across a turnip field and a flight of hurdles, the heavy ground telling more and more upon the gray, then landing over a fence into two hundred yards of ridge and furrow, bordered by a bank with a five-foot " yawner " on each side—an obstacle that was negotiated safely by Satanella and Rattlesnake ; the gray, however, not so fortunate, failing to clear the ditch on the other side, slipped, and fell on his haunches, throwing his rider and nearly rolling upon him.

The race was now left to Bertie's chestnut and the black mare, both going splendidly and making for the " oxe "

straight before them. Guy was diverging slightly from his course to take the leap at a spot he had fixed upon, when, passing a cluster of stunted trees, an urchin perched among the branches waved a handkerchief tied to a bough, accompanying the act by a cheer. In an instant Rattlesnake threw back his ears, swerved so suddenly as nearly to unseat his rider, struck out his fore-legs, and threw up his haunches.

When he reached the ground Guy tried to calm him by voice and hand, but his temper was aroused, the devilry that had been slumbering burst out in all its fury, and he shook his head and snorted with passion.

Guy saw that the tussle was now to begin, so sitting firmly in his seat and pulling his cap over his eyes he drove his spurs into the chestnut's flanks. With a mad bound Rattlesnake jerked his head forward, striving to take the bit in his teeth, but finding the attempt ineffectual, reared almost upright, pawing the air with his forelegs. Guy threw himself forward, and by his weight brought him to the ground, trembling in every limb with passion.

There was no time to be lost if the race was to be won; the case was desperate, so Guy determined as a last hope to bully him. Collecting the reins in his grasp, he raised his whip and lashed the now maddened brute again and again between the ears. With a bound he dashed madly on towards the fence, seeming scarcely to touch the ground in the wildness of his flight. Guy tried vainly to hold him—he was away, so gripping the saddle firmly, and setting his teeth, he awaited the result.

Nearer and nearer they approached to the fence; it was the one of which Saunders had warned Guy, a five-foot ditch, and a rather tall, stiffish-looking bullfinch on the farther side. They were only forty yards from it, but the chestnut showed no signs of relaxing his speed. Now thirty, and Guy pulled at his head with all the strength of desperation, but he might as well have attempted to arrest an avalanche. Twenty yards separated them from the fence; it was too late now to

think of stopping. Ten! Guy stuck his knees into the saddle, and with a rigid look on his face prepared for the shock.

They were now only a single stride from the ditch. Guy lifted the chestnut to the leap, but Rattlesnake, in the blind madness of his career, utterly heedless of his rider, came with all his force against the fence, and breasting the tightly-bound branches, fell head foremost violently to the ground. Guy was shot out of the saddle by the concussion, falling heavily some yards before his horse, where he remained perfectly motionless.

Saunders, who had been watching the race from this point, sprang forward and caught Rattlesnake's bridle, as he scrambled up; then hurrying towards Guy, knelt by his side and raised his head, which was covered with blood flowing from a wound in his forehead.

"Mister Guy! Mister Guy!" he cried out anxiously, "are you hurt much, sir? That's better, sir," as Guy opened his eyes and after looking round vacantly regained his feet. "You've had a nasty purler, sir, and no mistake."

Guy seemed now to have collected his senses, and catching sight of Satanella, now only a field ahead—the pace at which Rattlesnake had come having reduced much of the distance lost—shouted excitedly—

"Quick, Saunders! help me up. Not a word! Now—that's it. No, never mind the whip—I can't hold it," and Guy was once more in the saddle.

The faint sound of a cheer from the stand, as this incident was witnessed, made his blood flow quicker, his pulse throb more rapidly. In desperation he thrust his spurs up to the rowels into Rattlesnake's flanks and pressed madly on.

The chestnut, somewhat cooled by his severe fall, seemed to have spent his temper. His turn of speed and wonderful staying powers now told, and when Satanella reached the next fence Rattlesnake was barely a hundred yards behind.

But Guy's chance seemed hopeless, and would have been so had not Satanella, stumbling slightly, refused. Thornhill, however, keeping her head resolutely at it, got her over. This de-

lay had considerably decreased the gap between them. Rattlesnake was only thirty yards behind, both making for the last jump, the double posts and rails, before the run in. Guy casting a quick glance at Satanella, and seeing that she was scarcely distressed, knew that it was useless to attempt to race her down in so short a distance.

They were within fifty yards of the posts and rails, and Thornhill was beginning to ease Satanella for the double. Then a sudden idea occurred to Guy—it was a desperate, an insane thought. By rushing the leap and taking it at a fly he could perhaps reach the mare, as the difference in the pace might close up the gap. It was the only chance of winning; and Guy, with the reckless desperation of a gambler, determined to hazard it. Satanella now got over, Thornhill popping her in and out in splendid style. Then, with brow knitted and teeth clinched, Guy pressed on, the gallant chestnut seeming to fly through the air. One last vigorous plunge of the spurs, and Guy lifted him to the leap.

Meanwhile the excitement in the stand was intense. Bertie, flushed with anxiety, his cheeks burning with the hectic glow of fever, was watching every incident of the race through his glass, while near him were Bentham, Lawson, Leath, and others of his set, forgetting in their eagerness the *blasé* manner it was usually their fashion to affect.

When Rattlesnake bolted, the excitement burst beyond all bounds. "He's gone away with him!"

"No, Lawrence holds him!"

"He doesn't, I tell you—the chestnut's bolted! Good Heavens! he'll never clear the fence—a good five feet at least."

"He's rushing it!"

For a second every voice was hushed as Rattlesnake rose to the leap, and then a cry burst from every lip, as horse and rider came to the ground.

"He's killed!" shrieked Bertie, his lips blanching with horror. "Oh, God, what have I done!" he moaned, burying his face in his hands.

A deafening cheer from the crowd made him lift his head eagerly, and he saw Guy regain his feet and remount the chestnut. "He'll do it now," shouted Lawson. "Will he? I'll lay three to one, four to one—a hundred to twenty on Satanella!" roared a bookmaker. "Put that down to me," shouted Bertie. "Again?" "Yes." "I'll lay it again!" bellowed the bookmaker. "Done!" cried Lawson, in response, "the race isn't over yet. The chestnut's picking up!" "Nothing but an accident can give it to him." "The mare's refused! Rattlesnake wins!" "No! Bravo, Thornhill! he's got her over." "What a pace! how Lawrence lifts his horse along." "Thornhill's easing her for the double." "Steady, Lawrence, steady! By Jove, he'll blunder! Take a pull at him, man." "Easy; good Heavens! he's going to fly it!" "He's mad! Fifteen feet if it's an inch, besides the posts and rails." "Now, Thornhill—well done! he's over! Splendidly done, by Jove!" "The mare wins!" "Satanella wins!" "Not yet: Now for it, Lawrence. He'll never do it! Now!—NOW!"—And a cheer that shook the stand burst from every mouth, as Rattlesnake, rising to the leap, cleared both posts and rails, shooting forward like a bolt in the wake of Satanella. "The chestnut wins!" "Rattlesnake wins!" "No, the mare!" "The chestnut!" "No! no! he'll never reach her!" "Twenty strides more!" "Satanella!—the mare wins! Satanella wins!" "No, she don't—the chestnut reaches her!" "Rattlesnake!" "Satanella!" "Rattlesnake!" "Rattlesnake!" "*Rattlesnake!*"

He had caught her on the post, and won by a head.

Amid the deafening cheers of the spectators, Guy rode into the enclosure—deadly pale, blood trickling down his forehead, and his jacket bedaubed with mud.

Dismounting at the weighing-room, with saddle, bridle, and martingale on his arm, he got into the scale. Then, as the welcome words "all right" were uttered, cheer after cheer, louder and louder, rose from the crowd that had collected to congratulate him.

Only one man stood silently apart, trying in vain to hide his annoyance, savagely biting his mustache. That man was Harvey Pearce.

"Oh, Guy, Guy, I wasn't worth all this," cried Bertie; springing forward, and in his excitement throwing his arms round him.

Guy uttered a slight cry of pain, as he disengaged himself.

"Steady, Bertie, I'd do more for you than that, young one. It wasn't so very—"

His voice faltered, his brain reeled, his lips turned ashy pale, and he fell heavily to the ground.

He had fainted. His arm was broken.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was a fair spring morning, seeming all the fairer and brighter after the long dreariness of winter.

April had come, and with its sudden showers and fitful sunshine was "weeping itself to May." The earth was awakening from her long torpor, and shaking off the "dreamless sleep which held every future leaf and flower."

The green buds were swiftly unfolding their bright emerald wings, the grassy meadows and banks of glittering yellow flowers rivalled the dewy tints of the fresh green leaves in the hedgerows, and the little streams and brooklets danced and sang over the shining pebbles, under the newly awakened smiles of the long-sleeping sun.

The atmosphere was so bright and clear, the blue sky, only flecked with lightest pearl-gray clouds blown softly along by little puffs of freshest air—that the birds were trying their new songs, and swelling their little throats in their efforts to outdo each other, and their bright gladness made poor little Kitty Lorton ashamed of the sadness and discontent that was

in her own heart, as she sat perched on a stile and listened to them.

This bright morning had tempted her to wander farther away than usual, for she had grown very dull and stay-at-home lately, but everything looked so beautiful to-day; she felt as if she should like to throw herself down in her favorite attitude under the trees, and watching the little clouds drift by, dream away the long slow hours.

For Kitty Lorton was a very idle young lady. She had no good but tiresome relations to admonish her or bother her by advising her to do something useful all day long, and I am not sure she would have done it if she had.

When she had been happy, she had been willing enough to employ herself, though it was generally in the way of amusement; everything had seemed to be nice and "jolly" then. Now everything was depressing, and wasn't any use when it was done—singing, for instance. Lady Caroline used to admonish her to cultivate her voice and tell her it was impossible for any one to sing without practice. *Eh bien*, Kitty was willing enough, and would sing by the hour together.

Glad, cheerful songs seemed but the outpourings of her joyous little heart, and the sad ones were charming in their very sadness. Now she would sometimes try to sing, but the happiness seemed to mock her, and her voice would break and fail at the sorrowful parts.

"I wish that I were dead, but I'm no like to die,"

sang poor little Kitty, and then the tears would come; not that she particularly wished to die, but she was sorry for herself that the gladness of a life which she had so thoroughly appreciated should be taken from her.

Putting aside love-troubles—and Kitty Lorton hated to think of herself as a lovesick young lady—what had she to make life happy, and worth having, like other girls?

A short time ago, she had a kind friend who was like a mother to her; a gay young companion, whom she had been

very fond of before he began to indulge in sentiment; a beautiful house, wherein she spent each day, surrounded with every luxury; and a horse to ride.

Kitty was fond of riding; she would have liked to live on horseback, and she never was so happy as when she was going at a good pace, on the pretty little thoroughbred that Lady Caroline had given her.

The horse was Kitty's own, but Captain Lorton would not keep it at the Grange, and, indeed, had no stable that was fit to put it in, the whole place was in such a state of dilapidation, so Bayard was left at Erlesmere; and though Lawrence had given most particular directions that one of the grooms should call every morning at the Grange, and should hold himself in readiness to ride with Miss Lorton whenever she should require him, Kitty in her pride and anger did not choose to be indebted to Guy Lawrence for anything, and thus she seldom or never availed herself of the opportunity of riding, though it made her heart ache to think of Bayard eating off his head in the Erlesmere stables, when she might be on his back, forgetting her troubles in the enjoyment of her favorite amusement.

So Kitty punished herself rather than let Guy Lawrence think she was dependent on him for anything—rather than feel that she owed any pleasure to his kindness.

It was not much wonder that Kitty Lorton, mentally comparing herself with other girls, thought her own life an exceptionally sad one. Each day she more keenly missed the kind friend who had taken compassion on her loneliness, who had so pitied the motherless child of a drunken father.

If Kitty had stood in need of pity then she stood much more in need of it now. She was, in her girlhood, more in want of friends and companions than ever she had been in her childhood.

Daily, the tipsy, scheming old gambler, who was her only relation, her only associate, drank himself a step nearer to the grave. Daily he threw off some more of the little restraint he had imposed upon himself, the small attempt to appear respec-

table, and lapsed more hopelessly into an abyss of blackguardism. Sometimes he would be out for days and nights together, and then Kitty had the house to herself, and preferred even the terrible loneliness to her father's presence. Was it possible that a child should feel anything but a shrinking, almost a loathing, for such a parent? The pitying, compassionate love Kitty had once had for him had died an inevitable death—it could not live under such provocation. For Captain Lorton had not even the redeeming quality which sometimes characterizes such men. He had no love for his own child. He would scheme and plot for his own future aggrandizement through her, and in some such hope—perhaps in some fear that “the young fool Deverell” would slip through his fingers—he had taken her to the vicinity of Oxford; but he was absolutely destitute of any tenderer feeling, or of any consideration for what she thought or felt.

Sometimes he would fill his house with companions who were little or no better than himself, and the poor girl would rush out to escape from the sound of their wild revelry, their frightful language, and their coarse mirth; and then, when it was night, creep up to her own room, and locking the door, sit trembling, lest in some drunken fancy Captain Lorton might choose to call her down into their midst.

She was very brave about most things, but the sight of her father when he was in the state in which he usually was now, had power to make her shiver and tremble with a horror which was not all born of fear.

It was not wonderful, considering all these things, that Kitty Lorton found herself utterly desolate, or that the people round Erlesmere, great and small, should hold themselves aloof from the daughter of such a man as Captain Lorton.

Sometimes Kitty would look with envy at the groups of merry girls whom she encountered in her rambles among the fields and lanes, taking walks or rides together—the inmates of some of the country houses around Erlesmere—and listening to their happy laughter, wish she were among them. Even the

village girls, who had fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers and friends, seemed to be better off than herself. But she was too proud to make any sign, or try in any way to ingratiate herself with any one, and she knew too well how scornfully she was regarded even by those girls whom she had met as equals at Lady Caroline's house or at the county balls, where she, Kitty Lorton, who was nobody now, had once been the belle, and well received as the chosen friend of one of the greatest ladies in the county.

Scandal always attacks the friendless, and she, with her pretty face, her disreputable father, and her reported audacity in becoming engaged to one of the young men at the great house, was a mark for many busy tongues.

She told herself that she did not care, and that her sorrows were too real for her to trouble herself about such trivialities as these; but if she had had friends and companions she would not have had so much time to brood over her cares, and she would have been happier and better accordingly.

As it was, she was absolutely alone, and terribly weary of the sad and useless life which seemed to have fallen to her as her portion in this world.

Of what use was it for her to busy herself about household matters, as some other women did? Kitty asked herself. The disorderly household and all its belongings were utterly hopeless and beyond the power of redemption. She had tried once, in one of her desperate attempts at doing her duty, to produce some alteration in the management, but she had only brought down a storm of indignation at her interference, and had desisted ever since.

Of what use for her to practise her music, her singing, or any of her pretty, lady-like accomplishments? Did not they seem utterly out of place and accordance with her surroundings, and who would take any pride and pleasure in them now?

Of what use to array herself in her pretty dresses—Lady Caroline's gifts—and carefully coil the chestnut hair in wonderful intricacies? Who was there to see and admire her

now? Who was there to care how she looked and what became of her?

Did no thought of Bertie Deverell, the man to whom she was engaged, her future husband, come into all Kitty Lorton's musings over the present and the future?

Yes; and with the thought of him came the worst trouble of all, for she told herself that she had done wrong, she had deceived him wilfully and persistently, and no good could come of it.

Many and many a time Kitty Lorton started up as if stung by the remembrance of her shortcomings, and clasping her hands in a fit of sudden repentance vowed that she would tell Bertie Deverell all the truth and break off her engagement. She would remember how Lady Caroline had loved this, her youngest son, and feel full of remorse at the thought of her own falseness.

But then again she would grow hard and bitter, and feel no pity but for herself. If she broke off this engagement, what hope was there for her in the future? It was her only chance of release from the miserable life she was now enduring, her only prospect of better things. She tried in vain to think what would become of her if she severed the only tie which bound her to any other human being in all the great sorrowful world.

If she married Bertie Deverell he would take her away from this wretched home. She liked him quite well enough to feel no repugnance at the thought of a life spent with him, and in the gay, bright world, in which, as his wife, she would be honored and sought after—no longer despised and disliked as the friendless Kitty Lorton—she would have no time to be sorrowful, or to regret the man she had loved and who had treated her so badly.

And moreover, Kitty had never doubted that Bertie Deverell loved her truly and well, and that it was in her power to make him happy if he married her—never doubted it until that day of the Aylesbury steeple-chase; but in that moment of *supremest bitterness*, when she had seen an involuntary flush

rise to Guy Lawrence's face as Captain Lorton had extended his hand to him in the ring, Kitty, looking from one to the other and noting the contrast in their appearance, had realized for the first time the sacrifice that Bertie Deverell or any other gentleman would make in marrying her.

In her morbid sensitiveness she greatly exaggerated the extent of the degradation which attached to her as the daughter of a man whom any gentleman would be unwilling to acknowledge as an acquaintance.

She was too proud and too honest to be ashamed of her own father, but she mentally vowed that no consideration of her own interests should induce her to marry Bertie Deverell.

In giving him up she felt that she gave up all hopes of a happier life, but she told herself it must be done, and Kitty was not the girl to hesitate when her own pride was concerned.

Sitting on the stile, her little childlike face propped on one small hand, her sad eyes gazing far away into the distance, she made up her mind that as soon as she could see Bertie, she would try and tell him that a marriage with her was not desirable, and that she wished their engagement to be at an end. But still she rather wanted to put off the evil day.

She knew that Guy Lawrence and Bertie were both at Erlesmere now. The latter, slowly recovering from his illness, had expressed no wish to see her yet, but the dread that she might at any time be called upon to see him had rather hastened her going out, and led her footsteps away from her usual haunts, farther out into the country that spring morning.

Kitty shrank from telling Bertie Deverell the whole truth, and had almost made up her mind that it would not be necessary to undeceive him altogether; she could manage to break off with him without acknowledging that she did not love him, never had loved him, even though she had given him such reason to believe she did.

To undeceive Bertie would be to undeceive Guy—for he would naturally hear all about it—and then all that she had done for the sake of misleading him, all the sins of which she

had been guilty rather than let him think she had thrown him her love unasked, would have been sinned in vain. And Guy Lawrence, hearing that she had broken off her engagement with Bertie through want of love would, in the vanity natural to mankind, believe that it was love for himself which had prevented her from marrying his brother. The scene in the library would recur to his mind, and perhaps he would laugh to himself over the silly girl who was still making a fool of herself for his sake.

"Never, never—he shall never think that," said Kitty, in a paroxysm of shame and anger at the mere thought. "I will find some other plea for breaking with Bertie, and if I can't, I'll marry him and risk the consequences. It may be wicked, but I can't help it."

So she argued to herself, with all the contradictoriness of a woman and the wilfulness and waywardness of a child. Poor little Kitty! all the old love that had rushed back to her heart when she had seen Guy Lawrence carried away from the race-course helpless and suffering, only made her more indignant against him for his treachery, more ashamed and angry with herself for still loving him.

A pretty little picture she would have made as she sat there on the stile, deep in thought, the gentle breeze ruffling her crêpe chestnut locks, and bringing a soft bloom to her delicate face, which had been strangely pale of late.

Such a dead stillness reigned in that remote spot which Kitty Lorton had chosen for the scene of her reflections—a stillness only broken by the twittering of the birds or the murmuring of the tender green leaves as they bent their heads and whispered together. One or two young half-fledged thrushes, emboldened by the prolonged silence, hopped and fluttered at Kitty's feet, but she never heeded them, though the birds and the trees and the flowers had grown to be her companions and friends now; and she was far fonder of them in her solitude and sadness than ever she had been in the time of her gayety and mirth.

Then they had seemed to her but as the pretty background to a picture in which she and a few others were the prominent figures.

The flowers and the ferns and the luxuriant grasses were a soft carpet for her feet, the waving trees with their entwined branches were a canopy for her head—nothing more. But lately she had grown to love them for themselves; to see a separate beauty in each; to feel that she and they understood one another, and were companions in solitude.

But Kitty did not heed them now. She was trying to solve the problem of her own life, and it was too hard for her. She grew tired of thought, she had been thinking—thinking till her head ached. She pushed back her hat, and gazed up into the clear bright sky, feeling, as I said, almost ashamed of herself for her sadness, when God had made the world so bright and fair.

There was a rustling of leaves, a crackling of branches, and a man, bursting his way through the thick brushwood and tangled weeds, jumped over the low hedge from the wood on the other side and alighted close behind the stile; then becoming suddenly aware of the proximity of the little gray figure seated thereon, gave vent to a smothered exclamation.

Kitty, after one tremendous start of surprise, kept her back turned with a pretence of unconsciousness which was very well attempted, but was not eminently successful, as the small portion of a cheek which was visible to the new-comer was dyed a deep crimson, and unless she had been stone deaf or in the magical sleep of a fairy princess, she could scarcely have been unaware of his very noisy appearance on the scene of action.

I think if Guy Lawrence had been at all taken in by Kitty's little artifice, and had thought it possible to pass her unseen, he would have been glad enough to do so, for he was not prepared to meet her so suddenly; as it was, he could only make the best of it, and he came to her side and held out his hand.

"How do you do, Miss Lorton?"

"How do you do?" said Kitty, extending an ungloved hand and averting a grumpy little face. "I do wish people wouldn't come behind one and startle one so."

"I thought you didn't see me," answered Guy, with difficulty suppressing a smile; "but if I am 'people,' I must apologize for my intrusion, and if I had known any one was sitting on the stile I'd have given warning of my approach. Were you meditating, Miss Lorton? I hope I haven't broken the thread of your reflections?"

Kitty was cross, for of all things she hated to be made fun of; so she answered, with an attempt at severity—

"It would be a good thing if more people indulged in meditation, as you call it. They wouldn't do and say so many foolish things; but I wasn't—I was only resting."

"No; you can't have done many silly deeds to repent over, in your short life," said Guy, with a wistful yearning in his eyes as they rested on her sad little face. A yearning which Kitty never saw, for she kept her own eyes persistently fixed on the ground.

It's a hard thing to keep up the conversation when the person you are speaking to persists in preserving a grumpy silence, and snubs all your well-meant efforts. And so Guy found it, but having once seen Kitty he could not tear himself away from her just yet.

"Did you enjoy the steeple-chase, Miss Lorton?" he asked, willing to give her another trial.

"Enjoy it? I should think not," answered Kitty, fiercely. "I'll never go to another as long as I live: noise and bustle and swearing and betting and—and people breaking their arms!" with a swift glance at the tall figure resting against the stile, with one arm in a sling.

"Poor 'people!' they are always doing something to offend you," said Guy; "perhaps they wouldn't have broken their arms if they could have helped it. Speaking for myself, I'm sure I wouldn't."

"But I'm glad—oh, so glad you won!" cried Kitty, in a

sudden burst of enthusiasm at the remembrance, and looking for the first time straight up into his face; and then meeting the quick answering light in his eyes, averting her own. "That is, of course, for Bertie's sake; he would have been so disappointed if you had lost."

There was a silence after these last words, for it seemed to Guy Lawrence they were intended to remind him of the great gulf there was between them.

"When are you going to see Bertie?" he said at length. "He was speaking of you, wishing to see you—but he is still too ill to get out. Won't you reverse the usual order of things, and come to see him?"

"When your brother wishes to see me, no doubt he can ask for me himself," answered the girl, coldly.

"He was going to write to you to-day, but he is still very weak, and he begged me to ask you for him. I told him I wasn't sure I could, but now I have seen you, won't you let me convey his message to you? He has been awfully ill; so he thought it was not a case for the usual ceremonies, and you would waive them and go to him, instead of waiting for him to come to you. The sight of you would cheer poor Bertie up, and it can't seem strange to you to go to Erlesmere, it is so much like your own home—indeed, it seems more rightfully your home than mine, who have been so much away from it."

So spoke Guy—in his loyalty asking this favor for his brother as eagerly as he would have asked it for himself.

Perhaps it was that which irritated Kitty beyond endurance, and put the spark to her smouldering anger. She turned on him a face full of passion.

"Is your brother, like you, ashamed to come near us—ashamed to own us?" she asked.

Guy looked at her a moment in sorrowful wonder.

"I do not understand you. Can you know what you say, Miss Lorton?" he asked, quietly.

"Will you deny it?" she went on, scarcely heeding in her *passion what she said*. "Will you tell me that when my father

held out his hand to you on the race-course you did not shrink from him—you did not feel ashamed to own him? Do you think I did not understand you just now, when you said you had told Bertie you were not sure you could deliver his message? Do you think I did not know that the great, rich Mr. Lawrence was afraid to come to our house—afraid to be thought the friend of one who has sunk so far beneath him as Captain Lorton?"

Kitty paused, unable to proceed from the fierceness of her excitement, and stood with flashing eyes and quivering lips.

"No man alive should dare speak to me as you have done, Miss Lorton; but you are a woman, and must be pardoned," said Guy. His face had grown very white and he was gnawing his mustache, as he was apt to do when he was very angry. "You accuse me of the worst of all meanness—of cowardice. You have strangely altered since I knew you, to be capable of such thoughts."

"Yes, I *have* strangely altered," said Kitty, catching at his words. "The world has taught me many a hard lesson; among others, that I, Kitty Lorton, am no fit wife for an honorable man."

"Who has dared to say such a thing to you—to put such a notion into your head? Kitty, you must be mad: you are full of morbid ideas and fancied slights."

"I have learnt that a marriage with me," said Kitty, interrupting him, scarcely hearing his words, "is a social and moral degradation for a gentleman in your position. Heaven knows if I had been told this sooner no power on earth would have made me promise to marry Bertie. But it is not too late. I am only waiting to see him to tell him he is free, that nothing—nothing should ever induce me to be his wife."

"Would you sacrifice all his happiness and your own because some foolish, malicious person has put absurd ideas into your head? Tell me who it was!" cried Guy, fiercely.

"Who?" said Kitty, looking straight at him and speaking slowly. "There were many who said I was designing and

artful, and had taken advantage of Lady Caroline's kindness to 'catch' one of her sons, but I never heeded them. I thought they were spiteful and jealous. I thought myself your equal, until you taught me to the contrary."

"I?" said Guy, advancing a step nearer to her, and looking at her so sternly that she drew back half frightened. "You say *I* taught you?"

"Yes; I have told you how. When I saw you shrink from my father—no, don't deny it, for I won't believe you—all the truth came upon me like a sudden flash of light. I knew then for the first time that we—he and I, for I cannot separate myself from him if I would—were outside the pale of society, and then I remembered that though you had come to speak to me, and deigned to notice me when I was alone, yet when your friends came up to you, and one of them asked to be introduced to me, you pretended not to hear, and making some excuse, turned away. I knew that you were ashamed to know me, and I vowed that you should never feel so again."

"Good God!" exclaimed Guy. "You distort and twist the truth to make it serve your own ends, with the ingenuity of—a woman. I can scarcely stoop to justify myself to you, who do me such cruel wrong. That man was no fit acquaintance for you. It would have been contamination for you to know him. What do you know of such things? No, you shall listen to me," he said, snatching Kitty's hand to detain her—for the desire to break away and burst forth into bitter crying, was strong upon her. All the fierceness of her anger had ebbed away with her passionate words, and her chest was heaving with heavy, suppressed sobs. "For your own sake I will not let you go until you have heard the truth. Heaven knows what mischief all this may lead you to—mischief to yourself and Bertie. You have said many bitter words in your anger, and even you cannot think them true. You say I shrank from speaking to your father, but you must know that I could not be guilty of such a meanness, and that I was only *sorry, terribly sorry*, for your sake, to see the change in him.

It is dreadful that you, a pure-minded, innocent child, should be condemned to such association; but is it possible that any man with a grain of manliness in his nature should visit his sins on your head?" There was a moment's pause and then Guy spoke again. "Kitty," he said, still holding her hand, and unconsciously drawing her nearer to himself, "don't you think that if I loved a little girl like you, I should hold her love as the best and dearest gift in the world; that I should be proud of her above everything else in the world, and feel that it was she in her goodness and purity who stooped to me—not I to her?"

"No; I do not think it—I do not believe it. You are the very last person I should credit with such a feeling!" cried Kitty, snatching away her hand—forgetting in her anger that she was referring to that which she most wished to ignore, and bringing back to Guy's remembrance that which she most hoped he would forget. But seeing in the sudden flush which rose to his face that he had understood the reference to the past which her words implied, she turned away, her face crimson with shame, and left him without a word of farewell.

For a few moments Guy Lawrence stood motionless by the stile, too intensely wounded by her words to be capable of action.

Was it possible that she really believed he had not asked her for his wife because she was not good enough for him? The mere thought stung him to madness. He could not listen to such an accusation and keep silence. He turned after her and overtook her with a few hasty strides, forgetting all his resolves, all thought of his brother, only determined to speak out and tell her the truth.

"Stop, Kitty," he said, laying hold of her jacket to detain her, "You shall hear me. It was because Bertie—"

She turned on him a face white with passion.

"Pray don't excuse yourself at Bertie's expense. He is only too good and generous; while you—you—Let me go," and she broke away from him and fled ignominiously from the

field of combat, while Guy, dropping his hand, stood passive and mute, stung to the quick by the bitter injustice of her words.

He mechanically watched her receding form, and his face grew stern with a bitterness he could not repress.

Passion, scorn of the accusation she had thrown upon him, pity for her, horror at the remembrance of how nearly he had, in his anger, broken the silence he had enforced upon himself, chased each other through his mind in wild confusion. But little by little the bent brow relaxed, the hard lines faded out of his face, and nothing but pity—infinite pity for the girl who had wounded him so cruelly—remained, as with one last look into the distance he turned away with a broken sigh.

And Kitty hurried on: never heeding where she went.

The passion and misery so long pent up, had at last found vent. The thoughts so long brooded over, till injuries and slights, imagined or real, had grown to a thousand times their original magnitude, had at last been given utterance. The bitterness, so long buried in her heart, had broken loose and come to the surface at last.

She had succeeded beyond her desire in wounding the man she loved.

Kitty's passion had not subsided yet, and she felt glad, she could almost have laughed to think how her words had galled Guy Lawrence; how each arrow, poison-tipped with cruelty, had gone home and stung him to the quick.

But the reaction was to come—misery and shame at the remembrance of her own wild words.

She would rather have cut out her tongue than by word or sign have made any reference to that time which she hoped and prayed might be forgotten, forever buried in oblivion; that time when she had not only been scorned and lightly treated, but when she had, in her utter incredulity of what was too terribly true, acknowledged her own love; and yet now, in *the heat of her passion*, she had brought it back to Guy's

memory. Poor miserable little Kitty! As her wrath slowly ebbed away, she felt as if she could sob her heart out with remorse at the thought of all she had said in her sudden fury. She could scarcely remember it all, but she knew that she had taunted and sneered at Guy, and accused him of meanness; she knew that his face had paled at her words; that at first he had looked grieved and sorry—sorry for her because she was so passionate and wicked—but afterwards his face had grown hard and angry. She had made him angry. And—and all the time she had loved him so. She had so longed to confess all to him—all her sorrow, all her misery. She would have liked to have sobbed out all her troubles in his arms, and then to have died. She would like to die now; she felt as if her heart was breaking; there was no one to love her. If she might only ask him to forgive her, and then die! Kitty paused, fairly exhausted, for she had been running as if afraid of pursuit, and leaning against a tree, hugged the rough brown trunk with her white arms and rested her little tear-stained face upon it, sobbing like a child after its brief tempest of fury had passed.

She was but a child still, for she could cry and weep her troubles away. She had not learnt yet that "the eyes which cannot weep, are the saddest eyes of all;" that tears which flow quickly wash away half the bitterness of sorrow.

Then Kitty sat down on the soft moss, and unmindful of rheumatism and distorted limbs, leant her head against the friendly old tree, still

"A sighing and a sobbing."

But the sobs grew gradually quieter, and at last ceased altogether.

She had "cried herself out" as the old nurses say, and a sort of lull succeeded. She found herself watching the flickering leaves in a weary, dejected way, scarcely thinking or feeling anything at all, till everything became dreamy and unreal. The songs of the birds grew fainter and fainter, the branches

of the trees grew dimmer and dimmer, the swollen lids drooped over the aching eyes, and Kitty Lorton fell asleep.

She looked as she lay there with her little tear-blistered face, her gentle breathing now and then broken by the faint echo of a sob, like a naughty child, who, worn out by its own passion, has cried itself to sleep.

When she woke, the fleeting brightness of the April day had departed, the sun had disappeared behind some heavy clouds, the fresh air had grown chilly and made her shiver. She raised herself, and tried to open her eyes that were sore and heavy with crying. All her limbs were stiff and aching with lying on the damp moss, and she was oppressed with a confused sense of misery and desolation.

She would scarcely have been known for the pretty bright Kitty Lorton of past days. She was not cut out for a heroine, for crying did not improve her appearance. She could not cry and look pretty at the same time. The angry flush that had burnt on her cheeks had left her pale and tear-blistered; her eyes were swollen and red, and had heavy lines traced underneath them; her hair was tumbled, and her dress disordered. Altogether, she looked a very forlorn little damsel as she picked herself up, and wrapping her jacket tighter round her shivering shoulders, set forth on her dreary walk homewards.

It *was* a dreary walk, and when Kitty reached her uncomfortable home she thought how pleasant it would be if there was some one to welcome her there—a kind mother or gentle sister to greet her with loving smiles and cheering words—on whose tender bosom she might rest her weary head, in whose sympathizing ear she might pour out all her troubles.

A very different welcome than this which she was picturing to herself did poor Kitty receive, as with slow footsteps she entered the little porch.

Captain Lorton stood there in his usual state of semi-intoxication, with a letter in his hand.

“Where the devil have you been hiding yourself?” was his *affectionate greeting*. “Is this the sort of little game you play

every day when I am absent on business? Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me where you have been?"

"I've been for a walk," faltered Kitty, weary and faint from hunger.

"Been for a walk, have you?" sneered the Captain; "pretty joke when a young lady leaves her home at ten in the morning and returns at six in the evening, giving no better account of herself than that! I'll not stand any of these pranks being played in my house, Miss—it isn't respectable."

Kitty brushed past with something of a smile curling her lip; but he stopped her.


"I'll have none of your fine-lady airs here, madam," he said, with an oath; "you listen to me. You've grown deuced cool about that young lover of yours, lately; but don't you think to play fast and loose with him, or you'll get the worst of it. Here's a man from Erlesmere with a letter—wants an answer, and you mind what I say."

Kitty took the letter, and read it hastily. "Where's the servant? Let him tell Mr. Deverell I will come to-morrow," she said, quietly.

"Any other orders, madam?" mocked the Captain; "I suppose your ladyship couldn't take the trouble to write an answer?"

"No, I am too tired—that message will do," Kitty answered, abruptly, hastening up the stairs, longing only for the shelter of her own room, feeling that she had this fear also to add to her many difficulties—the almost sickening dread of her father's rage when he should hear that she had broken her engagement with Bertie Deverell.

CHAPTER XII.



BERTIE DEVERELL had been seriously ill. The excitement of the race and his anxiety on his brother's account had increased an illness, the seeds of which had been sown by his reckless life and dissipated habits.

The morning after Rattlesnake's triumph he was in a high fever, raving of horses and ruin, playing imaginary games of écarté, and talking all manner of incoherent nonsense.

For several days Guy Lawrence, who had made very light of his own accident, watched by his bedside anxiously, and when he was well enough to be moved had brought him to Erlesmere.

According to the old proverb—

“ When the devil was sick, the devil a saint would be ;
When the devil was well, the devil a saint was he.”

Bertie was wonderfully quiet and subdued in manner when he first returned to consciousness. He was never happy except when Guy was near him, and seemed to cling to him with an affection he was very far from showing in the days of his health and strength.

It would have been strange indeed if he had not felt some sort of gratitude to his brother.

Never once since the day of the race, when through the skill and pluck of his rider Rattlesnake had won, and Bertie been saved from ruin, had Guy blamed him for his imprudence and folly, or preached on the uncertainty of things in general and steeple-chases in particular. Never once had he drawn a moral from the tale, or done anything but depreciate the part he had himself played in the performance. Though Bertie was too selfish to thoroughly appreciate the generosity of others, he could not be blind to all Guy had done for him. But convalescence is trying to the most patient of us, and he who was a *short time ago* so full of health and strength, found it almost

unbearable to be obliged to lie stretched on a sofa, feeling too weak to move, with no possible amusement to while away the weary hours.

He grew impatient and irritable, and many a time tried Guy's long-suffering almost beyond endurance.

At College—what with riding and boating, billiards and card-playing, smoking and drinking, with occasional visits to chapel and lecture when they had been absolutely unavoidable—Bertie had managed to pass away the days quickly enough, and he had not thought much about Kitty, or been overwhelmed with grief at the separation from her. But now when he had nothing to do or to think about, it occurred to him that it would be very pleasant to have her to amuse him; he began to remember how much he had been in love with her, and to feel rather piqued at her want of attention.

"Hang it," he said one day to Guy, "I think she might have come over to see me, or at least to inquire after me, when she knew I was so ill, instead of sending that confounded old duffer."

He did not know that the "confounded old duffer," i.e., Captain Lorton, had come on his own account, not from any solicitude on Kitty's part; that she, absorbed in her perplexities, had thought very little about her lover's illness, and was only dreading the day when she would be obliged to see him.

But now Bertie lay among the velvet cushions of his luxurious couch in the little morning-room of Erlesmere, expecting Kitty's arrival—for in answer to his note she had sent word that she would come to-morrow.

To-morrow had turned into to-day, and the morning was passing, but she had not come.

Bertie turned impatiently from side to side and cursed the luck which kept him there a prisoner, robbed of health and strength, and made him unable to seek her himself.

The room was the picture of ease and elegance; the sun gleamed on richly tinted blue satin curtains, on delicate walls painted in artistic frescos, on tempting soft-pillowed lounges,

and tables strewn with every inducement to laziness, in the shape of poetry-books, new novels, and periodicals.

One side of the room opened into a conservatory, and a little sparkling fountain bubbled and sang in the midst of the gayly colored exotics whose delicate perfume scented the warm air.

Bertie himself, in a loose black velvet coat and a violet scarf, his face refined by recent illness, looked like the central point of a brilliantly colored picture.

Guy used to chaff him about "getting himself up for effect" in his convalescence, and certainly the black velvet made a good contrast to his golden hair and pale face. So Kitty thought as, coming gently through the half-opened door, she stood and looked at him a moment as he lay there with his eyes half-closed. Then she moved forward, and Bertie hearing the sweep of her soft dress over the carpet, half sprang up and held out his hands.

"My darling," he said, drawing her to him and kissing her, "why have you not come before?"

Kitty drew back her face, but left her hands in his.

She had never in her life looked lovelier than she did that morning, as she stood and looked down on her young lover with eyes full of tender compassion. It is impossible to paint in words a face like Kitty's, so that you can see it as it really was.

"If one could have that little head of hers
Painted upon a background of pale gold,"

the delicate oval face, the cheeks flushed by the April wind, the parted dewy lips, the glory of her sunny hair and great soft eyes—all might be there; but the face that looked at you from the canvas would be a still one, and so unlike the living, breathing loveliness of the girl herself.

It was a face that set the regular rules of beauty at defiance: it was unlike any other, and bewildered you with its constant changefulness. Now smiling and dimpled with rosier blushes than ever Madame Rachel sold; now pale and sad, with heavy, *sorrow-laden eyes*.

Kitty's heart was full of tenderness for Bertie, who she thought loved her more than did any one else in the world. By reason of the exaggerated, morbid ideas which she had lately taken into her head, of the degradation which attached to her through her father, she immensely overrated the generosity and unselfishness of Bertie's attachment. However much he had groaned over the connection with Captain Lorton, however much he had deplored himself on the subject, he had been too true to his class, the race from which he sprung, to let the girl herself know that he thought it any sacrifice to marry her.

"And all the while he must have known it was a sacrifice—he must have loved me so well and so truly to be willing to give up so much for me; and yet he is so generous, he has never by word or sign led me to think he stooped to me," thought Kitty, feeling full of tender gratitude to the man who had been so good to her—not knowing that any sacrifice which Bertie had made had been only made to his own selfishness, as a spoilt child will obtain a toy at any cost rather than deny himself the gratification of its possession.

She did not know how often Bertie had lamented over the connection with the house of Lorton which was inevitable if he would not give her up. She did not know that when he was at College, surrounded by friends and admirers, and (being through Guy's generosity always flush of money) a swell in a small way, he had sometimes repented of the rashness which had made him think of marrying young, and groaned to think how they would all laugh at the idea of his turning Benedict at twenty-one, "just when most fellows are beginning to see a little of life," thought Bertie disconsolately.

But illness and solitude had somewhat changed his ideas, and marriage and consequent companionship with a pretty girl did not seem such a bad thing after all. "And Kitty isn't the sort of girl to expect one to be always tied to her apron-strings. I can throw the old duffer overboard very soon, and it will be always pleasant to have a nice home and a pretty girl to come to *when I am tired of kicking about*," said Bertie to himself.

chewing the cud of his matrimonial reflections, and gazing with half-closed eyes at the angels and cupids disporting themselves in a state of nudity on the azure-painted ceiling. And then Kitty came in—Kitty with her cheeks fresh tinted by the wind, and eyes full of loving tenderness; and the sight of her added warmth to his not very glowing feelings, and made him forget that he had ever cooled down in his ardent anticipations of married felicity; made him forget everything, but that she was very pretty, and he was in love with her.

“Poor Bertie!” said Kitty, gently caressing his hand with hers and speaking softly; “you have been very ill.”

“Yes, and Kitty never cared enough about me to come near me, or even to come and ask how I was. Cruel little Kitty,” said Bertie, trying to draw her face down to his. But Kitty gently pushed back his hand: she could not forget what she had come there to say, and that he had no right to kiss her any more; but it was so hard—so hard to tell him, and he was so unconscious of the fate that was in store for him—so loving and happy. How could she ever begin?

“And what have you been doing all this time, my darling?” said Bertie, looking at her fondly, quite ignorant that anything was wrong, and much too self-confident even to doubt her love for himself. He scarcely heeded that she drew back from his caresses, for he knew that she had never been fond of demonstrations, had never indulged in them but once. “You look well enough; your bright face is a sight indeed for eyes sad and weary with long solitude.”

Kitty laughed. “Poor Bertie! you’re not used to it as I am.”

“And then it was hard on me to knock up just at that time,” went on Bertie, glad to find an ear into which to pour out his grievances. “You don’t know how I looked forward to riding that steeple-chase. None of the other fellows could have done it, and I had staked everything on it. It was hard lines.”

“Yes it was,” said Kitty, soothingly; but it didn’t matter *as it turned out, did it?* ”

"It was wonderful luck, Guy's showing up just in the nick of time, and he was a brick; but all the same, Kitty, I wished I was in his place," said Bertie, with unconscious selfishness. "And you were there too, and I scarcely saw you. How did you get on?"

"Not very well, Bertie," answered the girl, her thoughts wandering, her face growing sadder and paler now the transient flush was fading out of it.

She was wondering how she should begin her hard task, how she should introduce the subject on which she knew she must speak to him, wishing that he would say something that would lead to it. Bertie went on talking, she went on listening, or seeming to listen, but still they in no way approached that topic which was so important to them both, of which it was making Kitty's heart cold to think.

At last Bertie began speaking of the future, her heart bound-ed with a sudden throb, and then stood still—now was her time, she must speak now, or forever after hold her peace.

"It will not be long to wait now, dearest," he was saying, still holding her hand and looking tenderly into her eyes; "one short year and then I shall be able to marry you, and take you away from your dull home, and we shall be so happy, Kitty."

"Bertie, you must listen," said Kitty with a sort of gasp. "I—I must tell you something."

"What is it, darling?" he answered, putting his arm round her and drawing her gently toward him. "I will listen forever, if it is to tell me that you love me—you so seldom tell me that, Kitty."

"No, no—it isn't that," she cried, pushing her hands away. "I shall never tell you that again—I shall never marry you."

And then, having made her sudden plunge, she paused breathless, and looked at him.

Bertie raised himself from his easy attitude and gazed back at her in sheer astonishment.

"What do you mean, Kitty—what is the matter?" he said at last. "Have I said anything to vex you?"

"No, Bertie—never, never; you have been too good to me always. For that very reason if for no other I would not marry you. Do you think I will let you give up so much and do yourself this wrong, just because you are more generous and kind than all the rest of the world put together?"

"Kitty," said Bertie, pushing back his hair and staring at her in bewilderment. "Am I mad, or are you? What is the meaning of all this?"

"No wonder you cannot understand me," she answered, calming herself with an effort. "I have been speaking wildly, but I will try and explain. It is such a hard, cruel thing to have to say to you, and you do not know how sorely it pains me to be obliged to say it; but no fine words will soften it, Bertie. I cannot marry you—hush, please—please listen to me. It is not for my own sake I speak—it is for yours." She paused, and then went on very quietly. "The world has taught me many hard truths lately: it has taught me that you and I are not equally matched, that you who are rich and honorable stoop and lose caste in marrying the daughter of a man fallen so low, so disgraced as my father is. You, in your generosity, would not have let me know this, but I have found it out for myself, and I am too proud to marry you."

"Kitty, Kitty, who has put these ridiculous ideas in your head?" cried Bertie, using in his anger almost the same words as his brother had done the preceding day. "My poor little darling, you must forget all this nonsense."

He stood up, though he was weak and tottering, and would have drawn her to him, but she pushed him gently back on the sofa and sat down beside him.

"Bertie, believe me, I am not speaking in excitement or without proper thought. It must be all over between us. We shall be good friends always, I hope, though there must be no more thought of marriage. Believe me, dear Bertie, you will live to thank me for saying this, though it seems unkind and cruel now. You might be happy enough at first, but when the *novelty had worn off*, you would be ashamed of my father, per-

haps ashamed of me, and wish you had never married me. Do you think I could bear that, Bertie?"

Kitty spoke earnestly, and in her eagerness unconsciously laid her hand on his arm.

Bertie almost shook it off.

"Do you think me a brute?" he said, angrily. "If these are your ideas, it's a pity you did not think of them before you promised to marry me. May I ask what is the cause of all this?"

Kitty looked at him, the tears gathering in her eyes.

If he had known what pain it was to her whose heart was yearning for love, to destroy, and with her own hand thrust away the love which he offered her, he would scarcely have spoken so harshly.

"There is no other cause but that I have told you," she faltered; "and it is true—you cannot deny it, Bertie—that you would give up much in marrying me—and I cannot let you do it."

Bertie's anger was passing.

"You little goose," he said, looking reproachfully at her; "and so because somebody has put some high-flown, new-fangled rubbish into your silly little head, you came here in real, sober earnest to break off your engagement with me? Why, Kitty, I'll bring an action for 'breach of promise' against you. My darling, don't you know how proud I shall be of my little wife, the prettiest girl in all the county? Don't let us have any more nonsense—you nearly made me really, seriously angry."

"It is not nonsense; I wish it were, Bertie," said Kitty, speaking calmly, in very despair. "I mean it all; you must try and forgive me; and, oh! don't be angry with me—you are the only friend I have."

"You mean it!" said Bertie, fiercely; "you deliberately and intentionally throw me over, and you come here in cold blood to tell me, without any regard to what my wishes and feelings on the subject may be?"

He spoke savagely, for the spirit of contradiction which is

so strong in most men, made Kitty Lorton appear all the more precious in his eyes now that he was in danger of losing her. Moreover, his vanity was likely to receive a terrible blow. It was almost impossible for him to believe that any girl, least of all this one, who had pretended to love him, should be willing to give him up like this.

"And you have trumped up this paltry reason as an excuse," Bertie went on, finding Kitty did not speak. "It would have been better to tell the truth and say you did not love me."

His words hit her hard—harder than he thought; but still she spoke the truth when she answered him.

"It was not because I did not love you I made up my mind to say this to you. And this is no excuse; it is only too true that I am not your equal—that you could not marry me without feeling ashamed of me and of my poor father. My eyes were blinded to this fact for a long, long time, Bertie, and you were too generous to open them: but when they were opened, then I knew that you and I must never be more to each other than we are now."

She paused, but Bertie had buried his face in the cushions in sullen silence.

"For pity's sake don't make my task harder than it is; don't part from me in anger. I—I am so lonely and miserable, Bertie."

He lifted his head.

"I wish to Heaven I could understand you, Kitty; one minute you drive me from you, the next you complain of being lonely and miserable. Is my love nothing to you that you can give it up so easily?"

Kitty only bent her head, so that her face was almost hidden; but she did not answer.

"Kitty, some one who wishes to separate us has made you take up this idea; but you should have been wiser than to believe all this rubbish. It's a lie—a confounded, trumped-up lie—and I shall never be ashamed of you, I will never give you up."

"And you will never be ashamed of my father—never think that you have married beneath you?" asked the girl, fixing her great soft eyes on his face.

Bertie crimsoned.

"Good Heavens! Kitty, why need you put me through this sort of inquisition? I marry you—not your father. What does it matter to me about all the rest, so long as I have you?" Bertie spoke tenderly, and put his arm round her, but she gently drew herself away.

"You have said enough, Bertie," she said, quietly. "If you were a different sort of man, and cared nothing for the world, and only for me, I might let you make this sacrifice; but knowing that you would repent of it, I will not."

The words were simple enough, but she spoke them with a quiet dignity which became her well.

"Good-by, Bertie: won't you say good-by?"

Bertie looked at the little pleading face that was close to his own. For a moment he kept silence, the next he drew her suddenly down to himself, and, holding her prisoner, kissed her passionately.

"I will never let you go. You are mine; I will not release you—I will keep you to your promise, even against your will. Consider yourself free, if you like, but when I am of age I will come and claim you for my wife, and you *shall* marry me."

Kitty freed herself from his grasp, and stood before him with a crimson face.

"You make me regret less that I have pained you. You have no right to treat me like this." And she turned to go.

"Stay, I will not let you go until you promise me that you will be my wife."

"I will not promise," answered Kitty, roused to defiance.

Bertie threw himself back on the cushions, half in anger, half in exhaustion, and his face, that had been so flushed, became white as death. Kitty's heart smote her that she had not remembered his recent illness, and had tried his strength too far; and she bent over him, speaking more softly—

"Bertie, one day you will be glad that I have done this; but I have seemed unkind now, and I had forgotten that you were not strong. Oh, Bertie, please look up and tell me you forgive me before I go."

"My forgiveness can matter little to you who have so soon tired of me," he muttered, sullenly. "I should have thought it more straightforward if you had told the plain truth—said you were sick of me, or had some better *parti* in view, whichever it might be—than have tried to humbug me with this nonsense."

"You are unjust," cried Kitty, with something like a sob rising in her throat; "cruelly unjust." And then she turned to go without another word.

"You are going now, I suppose," said Bertie, raising himself, scarcely knowing what he said in his anger, "to blazon forth to all the world that you have jilted me, and I am to play the character of the forsaken. I am to—"

"Hush!" said the girl; "don't say what you'll be sorry for afterwards. There is no need to tell any one unless you wish it. It can't do me much harm to keep silence."

She was glad of the respite, glad not to be obliged to tell her father just yet, and that which would have deterred most girls from making such a promise had no power to influence her. What mattered it to her if all other men thought her engaged to Bertie Deverell? there were none likely to woo her, or for whose wooing she would care.

"Kitty, you have been cruel and heartless, but I have loved you, and I cannot give you up like this," pleaded Bertie, his anger again melting into tenderness. "Wait till I'm of age—only one year and a few months—it isn't long, but it is long enough to prove my faithfulness to you. If then I am the same, will you not believe that my love is above all other considerations? Say that you will wait for me, that you will not marry any one else, and that if I come to you then, you will not be so hard."

"*There is no chance of my marrying, but I will not promise*

anything—for your sake. And you will not come, Bertie,” she said, with a sad smile, and a look that seemed like prevision in her beautiful eyes. But Bertie, pouring out a string of prophecies, promises, and anticipations of the bright future that was to be theirs, scarcely heeded her.

Kitty rose to go; she took his hand in hers. “Good-by,” she said, ignoring his last words; “I shall not see you again—our ways lie far apart.”


Bertie seized her hand and covered it with kisses, but she tore herself from him and was gone before he could reply to her or call her back; and as the door closed sharply, and shut her out from his sight, his eyes fell on a little packet that lay at his feet.

It was his own letters—a few scrawly, boyish-looking epistles, sent chiefly from Oxford, and the little gypsy-ring, studded with diamonds and turquoises, that he had given her. He threw them from him with an oath, and started up to follow her; but he had forgotten his weakness: his strength failed him, and he fell heavily back, cursing his luck and Kitty Lorton by turns.

When Guy came in he found Bertie in a savage temper, and he obtained no replies to the few questions he could not refrain from asking about his brother’s interview with Kitty Lorton.

Baffled in his love, wounded in his vanity, Bertie Deverell vowed in his passion that he would never again see or speak of the girl who had injured him. Least of all would he acknowledge to his brother that she had thrown him over.

So it was that Guy Lawrence went abroad again, unaware that the engagement between them was broken.

 well of Bertie Deverell. The month drawing to a close, and daily the drive seemed thronged with carriages; daily the brilliant crowds that fluttered and buzzed about the chief: Vanity Fair grew thicker. Everybody was in the *crème de la crème* of Belgravia and Mayfair, and-water of Brompton and St. John's Wood. Impossible to count the number of dilettante languid motored along Dundreary Row of a morning, or 1 rails by the corner in the afternoon—

“ Their name was legion, and their bearing bu

People said there never had been such a gay scene the hot June sun had sunk behind the clouds, mellow twilight, that was not darkness, had filled squares and streets, the carriages, with their sp and their gay liveries, used to roll along the du countless numbers, bearing dainty white-robed ladies or ball.

One little solitary girl sat perched in an upper one of the large houses in Grosvenor Square, and whirling past and wondered where they were

these fashionable ladies, who seemed to live only to amuse themselves. She used to wonder if she would be very happy if she were one of them, and sometimes she used to feel that it was very hard, very sad, that she should be shut out from all these things that made the world so pleasant and life so worth the living, and wonder what she had done that her fate should be so much harder than the fate of others. Poor little Kitty ! Her heart was very sore in these days, and she forgot to feel grateful for all the good that she had, in her regrets and longings over that which she had not.

Six months ago Captain Lorton had died, not the death of the righteous, but the only death that was to be expected for him. An attack of delirium tremens, sharper than any previous one, had carried him to his grave, unregretted, unlamented, unwept, save by his poor little daughter.

But Kitty, forgetting all his sins, remembering only his death, and all the horror of it, wept very long and very bitterly when he was taken from her forever, and she was left alone in the world.

His protection, maybe, had been worse than none, but death wipes out old scores, blots out past sins, and she forgot all that had gone before, remembered only that he was her father, and was dead. And oh ! the horror of a death like his ; the shrieks and cries of terror at the things which exist not save in the fevered imagination, the curses and blasphemies coming from lips so soon to be closed in death, the delirious ravings of crimes committed long ago in the irrevocable past, the calls for help which cannot be given, the despairing struggle against that which is inevitable !

In vain Kitty hid herself in the farthest corner of the house, in vain she shut her ears to keep out the terrible sounds. In the dead of the night they would come to her, and she would lie trembling in unutterable horror and praying for the light. And then when death came, and he lay there stiff and cold, when the form that had been so debased by long indulgence of sin was wrapped in the terrible grandeur of an awful stillness ;

when the hush there falls on us all at the presence of an unfathomable mystery had fallen on the house whose walls had so lately resounded with fearful cries, then Kitty's terrors only increased. She, who had called herself brave, shrank in sickening fear from the inanimate thing that had once been her father. She had no friend to reason her out of the morbid terrors which had come upon her with too much loneliness; and they stole the health and strength from her, the bloom from her cheeks, and the lustre from her eyes.

The pale, sad-eyed, black-robed girl who came to London to look for a situation as a governess was a very different Kitty Lorton from the bright, blooming little coquette who had ridden by Guy Lawrence's side under the trees one summer morning.

When Captain Lorton's affairs came to be looked into, it was found that Kitty would be very nearly destitute.

She was wondering where she should go, and what she would do, almost wishing that the churchyard which sheltered her father would shelter her too, from a world in which she had no home, no resting-place, when there came to her a letter from a niece of Lady Caroline Deverell, who had been a constant visitor at Erlesmere in the lifetime of its mistress.

She was married, rich, prosperous, and charitable; she remembered the little girl who had been a *protégée* and favorite of her Aunt Caroline, and hearing of Captain Lorton's death, wrote to poor little Kitty a kind, generous letter, offering her a shelter in her house until she should find some situation that would suit her, and begging her to come at once, as it was not right she should stay, lonely and unprotected. Moreover, Captain Lorton's house was soon to be given up to the creditors, and even that shelter would be denied to the fatherless girl.

Poor Kitty! she was sorely afraid of going among strangers, but she had no choice. She would soon have nowhere to lay her head; she was forced to accept the charity that was offered to her in her time of need.

Mrs. Hoare was handsome, gay, and in universal charity with herself and all the world.

She was the very model of a fair, fashionable English matron, but all her heart was not yet swallowed up in the abyss of fashion. The natural generosity of her nature asserted itself, and she gave plentifully out of her abundance to those that lacked.

She took a fancy to the poor lonely girl who came to her in her destitution, and would not let her go away among strangers. Perhaps she saw how unfitted she was, with her morbid sensitiveness, to encounter the world, to bear the slights and the trials to which she would be subjected in her new character of governess.

Moreover, though Kitty had, through Lady Caroline's kindness, received a good education, her acquirements fell far short of those exacted of a governess, in the present day of certificates and college examinations; for in her hours of pleasant idling, more than half of that which she had learnt had gone out of her lazy little head. So Mrs. Hoare would not let Kitty leave her, but kept her as a sort of governess and playmate for her own little fair-haired children, who were really too young to be beyond the teaching of a nursery governess; but she, in her kindness, could not bear the idea of the pretty, sad-faced girl going out into the world all alone, and so made an excuse to keep her in her own house.

"It was really much better," as she explained to her husband, "that the children should have a nice ladylike companion to go out with them, play with them, and teach them all that was necessary, than that they should be left entirely to the charge of nurses."

And so Kitty stayed, and her place was not a very hard one, and her mistress (though she saw but little of her, on account of her numerous dissipations) was a very kind one.

If she had known all that she might have had to bear, all that other women bred and nurtured quite as delicately as she had been have to endure every day of their lives, she might

have been more grateful for the comparative happiness which had fallen to her lot.

Mrs. Hoare did her best to make Kitty happy. She would sometimes take her out for a drive in her carriage, or to any amusements or entertainments at which she thought she would not be exposed to any slights; but Kitty, in her over-sensitiveness, shrank from mixing in a world in which she had no part or lot, and was never more lonely or miserable than when in the midst of a gay crowd of happy people, and yet not one of them; and so she always begged to be left alone, and her happiest time was when the children were in bed, and she could sit in the gloaming and dream and think all by herself.

To-night was one of Mrs. Hoare's receptions. Her house was one of the most popular in London, and she herself, still young and fair, richly dowered and amiable, was a very queen in her own little world.

Kitty's room—the schoolroom it was called—was high up in the front of the house, and from the window she could see the people arrive. She liked to watch the carriages with their bright lamps draw up before the house, to see the doors thrown open, the steps let down, and the ladies in their rich satins and velvets, their airy tulles and muslins, sweep over the carpet into the house. They would soon come now, and then the music would begin. Sometimes there were celebrated artistes who sang and played, and then Kitty would creep down the stairs and listen breathlessly, and she could even hear scraps of the conversation, whispered flirtations and compliments. Ah! once she was a chief actress in these sort of scenes—now she was only a spectator at a very great distance.

Kitty's reflections were interrupted by a tap at the door, there was a rustling of silken sheen, and Mrs. Hoare came softly into the darkened room.

"May I come in, Miss Lorton? You are all in the dark—how dull for you! My dear, I came to ask you if you wouldn't change your mind and come down for a little while; there'll be time to dress even now if you will."

"No, thank you; you are very kind, but indeed I'd rather not," said Kitty, springing from the window-sill, half ashamed at being caught moping in the dark. Then, just distinguishing with eyes that had grown used to the dim light, the fair woman in her silks and laces, "How beautiful you look!" she exclaimed.

"Do I?" with a gratified smile; "you little flatterer, you can't see me. But won't you come? we want some music to-night, and you can sing us one of your pretty songs; and Mrs. Pearson—you know the old lady who took such a fancy to you—and the girls will be here, so you won't be lonely."

The "girls" were Mrs. Hoare's sisters, all golden-haired and amiable like herself, and always ready to do their best to make the poor little governess feel at home.

"They are always kind, and you too," faltered Kitty; "but indeed I am out of place among them all. I am better here—and happier. I like to watch the people come," she added, with an attempt at a smile.

"Hark! there is a carriage—I must go. Well, I'm very sorry you won't come. Good-night, Miss Lorton. Ring for lights or go to bed; don't sit in the dark—it makes you dull." And the fair hostess swept away to receive her guests, and soon forgot all about the little lonely girl upstairs.

But Kitty stayed on at the window till it had grown quite late, watching the people come and go. She was glad she had not gone downstairs, to be stared at and commented on, to hear people ask who she was, and fancy the whispered answer, "only the governess." All Mrs. Hoare's kindness could not shield her from this sort of thing, and though half of it was imaginary, yet Kitty in her plain black dress looked very different from the gay butterflies in their gauzy robes, very far apart from them, and was better in her solitude than in their midst.

Carriage after carriage had deposited its gay occupants at Mrs. Hoare's door. Hansom cabs, broughams, and private cabs, with high steppers and well-got-up grooms, had brought

dozens of men who all looked very much alike in their loose overcoats and light gloves. Some of the people were already going, for Mrs. Hoare's assemblies were very free-and-easy affairs, with a little dancing, a little music, a little of every thing, and people were free to come and go when they pleased. Kitty was getting sleepy, so she prepared to descend from the perch and go to bed—to dream perhaps of gay balls and whirling dances, in which she was the Cinderella, the admired and envied of all beholders. Another Hansom cab; another man cut out on the model of all the rest, loose-coated, gray-gloved. Ah! this one had a beard that looked dark in the uncertain light, and very broad shoulders. How like he was to Guy Lawrence! There flashed through Kitty's mind the remembrance of a day when she had looked out of her window down on him, just as she looked down on this other man now.

Then, she was in the country, and the air was sweet-scented with many flowers, and her heart was high-bounding with many hopes. Now, she was here, where the air was smoke-tainted and stifling, and her heart was heavy-laden with many sorrows. After all, men were all very much alike; Guy Lawrence was abroad. Kitty had heard Mrs. Hoare lamenting only yesterday about her favorite "cousin Guy," and wondering when he would return; and yet here was a man just like him, a fashionable evening-party-going man, who had come to flirt and dance with the girls downstairs.

Kitty heaved a sigh, sprang from the window-sill, and very soon lost the thread of her remembrances and musings in the sweet forgetfulness of a dreamless sleep.

Downstairs, amid the bright lights, the gay music, the hum of many voices and soft laughter, the hours sped merrily enough. The girls in their light floating dresses, the matrons in their rich-colored silks, satins, and velvets, and their glittering diamonds, looked like the brilliant pictures of a kaleidoscope, ever shifting, ever changing. Fair girls, with snowy shoulders,

"Smiles in their eyes, and simpers on their lips,"

were flirting their fans, coquetting, dancing; matronly dowagers were discussing their own and their neighbors' daughters, were shaking their heads over the last delicate morsel of scandal; men were lounging in groups in the doorways and corners of the room, looking as if the conjugation of the verb *s'amuser* was an intensely fatiguing affair. And a new-comer was pushing his way through the room in search of the hostess: a man with a brown face, a short curly beard, and very broad, strong-looking shoulders. There was something different about his appearance to that of most of the other men in the room, who were many of them pale-faced and effeminated by the dilettante fashionable life it was their wont to lead. People turned to look at him, and wonder vaguely who he was, but when he found the hostess, and pushed his way through the little coterie of admirers by which she was always surrounded, she knew him at once, in spite of his bronzed face.

"Guy," she said, coming eagerly forward, "is it really you, or your ghost?"

"My ghost, I suppose, Clara," answered Guy, shaking her warmly by the hand, "as I've been buried alive for a year or more. It's just the hour for *revenants*, so I won't apologize for turning up so late, and without an invitation."

"Denizens of the other world always come unasked," laughed Mrs. Hoare.

"And when they're not wanted," retorted Guy; "but it will be daylight soon, and then of course I shall disappear *en règle*, with a rattle of chains and a smell of sulphur."

"Then I'll make the most of you while I've got you," answered his cousin, and then there followed such a string of questions, "Why hadn't he written to say he was coming back?" "Did he intend to remain, or go away again to that horrid Rome?" "Where was he staying?" "Wouldn't he come and stay in Grosvenor Square?" that Guy Lawrence found it difficult to stem the torrent, or to put in a word to explain how he had suddenly taken into his head to return to England, and had arrived as soon as the letter he had written to announce his ap

proach ; and going straight from his hotel to Bertie's rooms, finding him out had examined the score of invitation cards on his table, and found among many others for the same night, Mrs. Hoare's " At Home."

" So of course I pitched on that, jumped into a Hansom, and found myself once more in a gay and festive scene."

" You chose out my card from among all the rest ? " said Mrs. Hoare, with a beaming smile, for Guy was a great pet of hers.

" *Ca va sans dire*," answered he with a little bow. " But where is Bertie ? "

" He was here ; perhaps he is in the dancing-room—he's always in requisition, and a terrible flirt. I believe he counts his conquests by the dozen, and half the girls in town have fallen in love with his golden curls and blue eyes," laughed Mrs. Hoare.

" I'll go and look for him," said Guy, rising " *Au revoir, belle cousine*."

And before she could stay him, he was making his way through the still crowded dancing-room.

He pushed against a tall man who was lazily twirling his mustache and whitening his back against the wall, and turned to apologize.

" Hollo ! Bentham, is it you ? " he exclaimed, suddenly recognizing the owner of the long legs which had nearly upset him.

" Yes. I'm sorry to say it is," drawled Bentham, languidly, rubbing the injured member. " Wish it wasn't ; wish it was some other fellow's legs you'd smashed. Is that the sort of way they cut about at Rome ? If it is, I think, you know, I'd advise you not to do in England as Rome does."

" I beg your pardon. I was in a hurry," said Guy, with a smile.

" Ah ! that's it ; we're never in a hurry here, any of us. We've got nothing to do, and plenty of time to do it in."

" I hope I've not done much damage. I didn't see you,

'pon my honor," said Lawrence, his eyes roaming about the room in quest of Bertie.

"No? because I'm so small, I suppose," said Bentham, surveying his six foot three inches in an opposite mirror. "I say, old fellow, I've about had enough of this—I'm off. Come to the Club?"

"I'm looking for Bertie—do you know where he is?"

"Hooked it, hours ago. I shouldn't wonder if you found him knocking about the balls at the Club;" and Bentham pulled himself into an upright position preparatory to departure.

"All right, I'll come," answered Lawrence. "How came you in the dancing-room? You're not much devoted to this kind of thing, are you?"

"I? No. Can't afford it. Wears out too many boots; uses up too much wind. I was watching that girl yonder. Fair girl—splendid action—best thing out."

"Going to enter yourself for the Matrimonial Stakes?" laughed Guy.

"Well," answered Bentham, "it takes a good deal to surprise me, but I should be surprised to find myself at the St. George's slaughter-house. Bless you, I'm not such a fool as I look."

Guy laughed. "Have you seen much of Bertie?" he asked presently, as they found themselves obliged to wait for the departure of some other people before they could make their way to their hostess.

"No, very little. He's going the pace, Lawrence."

"How do you mean?" asked Guy, his face suddenly serious.

"I'm not in his secrets. I've scarcely seen him except at the Club or in the Park. He's always at the theatre, and I'm not much given to that sort of thing."

"That's a new taste," said Guy. "Bertie never could sit through a piece, unless it was a burlesque or a screaming farce."

Bentham looked at Guy with his eyebrows elevated to the very roots of his hair—there never was a very long space between the two.

"You don't mean to say you've not heard of the new actress?" he said, very slowly.

"No," said Guy, carelessly; "you know I'm quite behind the age."

Bentham gave a low whistle, and a sort of aside—"Whew, so Master Bertie's kept it dark!" But it is the nature of asides (off the stage as well as on) to be more audible than the rest of the conversation, so Guy turned with his brow knitted—

"Come, Bentham, what has Bertie kept dark?"

"I say, it isn't fair, you know. Mustn't tell tales out of school."

"But you say you're not in Bertie's secrets, so you can only tell what all the rest of the world knows. Surely I've a right to hear that?" answered Guy.

"Well, it's the talk of the town," began Bentham, twirling his mustaches half uneasily.

"What's the talk of the town? Why the deuce can't you answer me?"

"Why, Bertie, you know, and Estelle, the new actress. They're laying heavy odds he'll marry her."

"Good Heavens! Are you raving? Bertie marry an actress?" exclaimed Guy, his face suddenly white.

"Hush, my dear fellow; they'll think we're lunatics. Here's Mrs. Hoare."

And Guy found himself face to face with his cousin, and though his mind was in a perfect maze of bewilderment, he had to compose himself and shake hands, and talk merry, rattling small talk, with all the self-possession he could summon to his aid. It was marvellous how well he did it.

"Well, if you must go, but it isn't daylight."

"We can't see the daylight till you have closed your eyes," answered Guy. "Good-by—give my love to the children. Tell them I passed through Paris, and brought them heaps of

bonbons." And then they got away. Guy never spoke a word until he and Bentham were seated in the Hansom on their way to the Club.

"Tell me all you know," he said then, very quietly.

"Well, you see, she's an awful stunner—devilish fine woman. Every one raves about her. They trumped up some story about her being a lady, the daughter of a poor Italian contessa, or some rot—don't believe a word of it. She's no more a lady than I'm a cad." Bentham stopped to light a cigarette. Guy tried to restrain his impatience.

"And Bertie—how has *his* name got to be coupled with an actress?"

"Why, you see, he's awfully spoony on her; but that's nothing—there isn't a man in town who wouldn't go in for her if she'd have him. Dukes and lords and marquises, diamonds and bouquets and broughams, are all thrown at her feet; but if you'll believe me," said Bentham, dropping his habitual drawl, and giving an energetic puff at his cigarette, "she won't so much as look at 'em; takes their presents, and then laughs in their faces. She's dangerous, 'pon my word—she's awfully dangerous, that woman."

Bentham paused.

"But Bertie," said Guy again.

"Well, I'm coming to that—what a deuced hurry you're in! Estella deludes all the world, and deludes Master Bertie into the belief that she's in love with him. But you mark my words, Guy—that woman's as deep as the bottomless pit. I know her little game."

"What the—" began Guy.

"Marriage, my dear fellow: simply that—marriage; and she knows that Bertie's the only one of all the lot who's fool enough to think the game's worth the candle. There's many of them would bid high, but not so high as that."

"What right—I beg your pardon—what reason have you to suppose that Bertie thinks of marrying this woman?" asked Guy.

"I've little doubt that if she plays her line as well as she's thrown it, she'll hook him," answered Bentham, coolly.

"And why should this—adventuress—Heaven knows I'm tempted to use a stronger word than I ever tacked to a woman's name yet—why should she pitch on Bertie for her victim?"

"Haven't I told you? Because he's mad about her, makes a perfect fool of himself. He's her slave, her shadow; and then *sans doute*, she thinks it not a bad spec. He's very flush of money, and passes for no end of a swell about town. He and Leath—you remember Leath?—have started a drag between them—a team of roans; rather a weedy lot."

Guy puffed away at a cigar, but he did not speak. Perhaps he was wondering where he should find the money to pay for all this extravagance—for that it would come out of his pocket sooner or later there could be little doubt.

"And there's that cad Pearce—Bertie's awfully thick with him. You know they fell out after the steeple-chase; Bertie cut him, but the other got round him somehow, and now they are as thick as brimstone and treacle. Pearce is now giving Bertie a few lessons in billiards and other things, and Bertie thinks he's a match for him, but he isn't."

"I wonder Bertie can tolerate that snob, especially after that affair at Aylesbury," muttered Guy, with his brows gathered into an ominous frown; "there was a strong taste of brimstone in some of his doings there. Here we are." Guy sprang out. As he paused a moment on the steps, the early daylight of a June morning shone on his face, and brought out many lines and furrows, and some white hairs in his beard. He looked like a man of forty as he stood there, ostensibly to take a look down Pall Mall and mark the new features in the old familiar face, but really to throw away all traces of the anxiety which he felt. "You must make allowances, Bentham," he said, taking his companion's arm, and pushing back the wide door of the Junior —; "I feel I've been awfully surly, but—I couldn't help it."

"All right, Guy," answered Bentham, cordially; "we shall

find the youngster here, and I've no doubt you'll pull him through. Got him out of the last scrape, you know, and will out of this."

And then they ascended the staircase and made straight for the billiard-room.

Bertie was not in the larger one, but Bentham led the way to another and less frequented, and looking through the glass in the door, saw him playing a game with Pearce.

"There they are," said Bentham, "the wolf and the lamb. Bertie submits to his fleecing with tolerable complacency. Let's go in and see them play."

Bertie came towards Guy and grasped his hand with a look of genuine pleasure at the surprise; but Guy, watching him saw that some after-thought, some remembrance, turned the momentary gratification which Bertie had felt at his sudden return into annoyance, and he inwardly cursed the unknown woman who had power to set his brother against him.

In the absence of all other love, Guy's love for Bertie had come to be the one all-absorbing devotion of his life. No mother could be more unselfishly desirous for his good than Guy had grown to be. He had merged all ambition for himself and his own happiness into ambition for Bertie's success and happiness.

Long ago he had dreams of his own, of standing for Sloughborough, where he was always safe to secure a seat through family influence, but now he was too indifferent to exert himself to make his life any other than it was. He had thought that whatever local prestige the Squire of Erlesmere might possess should be used on behalf of Bertie when he reached the age necessary to take a seat in Parliament, hoping that such a career might engender aspirations, the pursuit of which would wean him from the dubious style of life he had been living. But now it seemed possible that Bertie's own folly would put an end to all such ideas.

After greeting Bertie, and bowing with the coldest formality

to Pearce, Guy lighted another cigar, and threw himself on a lounge to watch the game.

"Your stroke, Deverell," cried Pearce, looking intensely annoyed at Guy's appearance. As Bertie approached the table, Guy had an opportunity to scan him narrowly. His face looked flushed and anxious, and there was a nervous twitching of his fingers as he made a "rest," that betokened ill for the coolness of his play.

Pearce, on the other hand, seemed quite calm and self-possessed, handling his cue with the freedom and precision of a skilled player.

The marker had called the score, "forty-two to forty." Bertie had missed a rather easy hazard, leaving a certain "loser" off the red. Pearce made it, scoring the required eight off the break, and winning the game.

"You ought to have won," said he to Bertie. "Awfully hard lines missing that hazard—lost you the game. Have another?"

"Yes, of course," replied Bertie. "That makes thirty—play you double or quits."

"All right. Spot the red marker."

For the first half of the game the scoring was tolerably even, although any one moderately skilled in billiards could see that the players were not well matched.

Bertie's strokes were more showy than effective, while Pearce never ran an unnecessary risk for the sake of a brilliant coup, but acted on the telling principle of rarely missing an easy one—at least this was evidently his great point, as Guy easily perceived from the accuracy with which he played some of his strokes; but on this particular occasion he not only failed to score when a cannon seemed a certainty, but did the same thing two or three times.

The first miss raised Guy's suspicions that Pearce had made it intentionally, and the subsequent ones confirmed them. Bertie was playing with such rashness and want of skill that, although not scoring himself, he almost invariably left Pearce

easy breaks. If his opponent had taken advantage of them, he must have inevitably won with the greatest ease; but this did not appear to be his policy—he evidently wished to make the chances seem so equal that Bertie would ascribe his defeat to luck rather than inferior play. There was no certain score left, but Bertie, playing hard, fluked a losing hazard. This brought the balls together; a series of easy strokes followed, which Bertie made, and then by a lucky kiss scored an apparently impossible cannon. Stroke succeeded stroke, and fluke succeeded fluke—the balls coming together with a strange persistency of good luck—until the game was called forty-seven to twenty. Bertie had only three to score. The red ball was near the top cushion, so placed that a fine gentle losing hazard would win him the game. Pearce saw that he had fooled his opponent too long, that a critical stroke was about to be played which would probably lose him sixty pounds.

Bertie was in position, when Pearce, taking a tumbler of brandy and seltzer in his hand, and judging his time, on the pretence of lifting it to his lips, let it fall with a crash at the moment that Bertie struck his ball.

The start that Bertie involuntarily gave spoilt his stroke, and he missed his hazard. Then Pearce, who was profuse in his apologies, carefully chalked his cue and began to play. Guy watched him narrowly, an ominous frown gathering on his brows as he saw the trap into which Bertie had fallen. But it required little knowledge of billiards to show that Pearce was really a most brilliant player, for he made stroke after stroke, "slow screws," "jennies," and "side twists," with a precision and exactness of strength that speedily scored, in a single break, the thirty points required, and made him the winner.

"Devilish hard luck, wasn't it?" said Bertie, pulling on his coat.

"I don't think luck had much to do with it," replied Guy, almost savagely. "Billiards are not your forte evidently—here's one great thing you haven't learnt yet."

"And what's that?"

"To know when you are over-matched."

"Pshaw! you argue from results. I suppose one of us was bound to win?"

"Exactly, if he tried—but that one wasn't you."

"Come on, you fellows!" cried Bentham, "let's get out of this atmosphere, it's—it's—"

"Infernal," laughed Guy, taking his arm and going out. "Yes, by Jove! that's just what it is."

They all stood together on the steps of the Club, lighting their cigars.

"Strikes me that fellow Pearce is a 'leg,'" said Bentham, puffing with unusual vigor.

"'Leg be hanged! he's a tolerably good player, with an intolerably large amount of luck, that's all," answered Bertie.

His face looked wan and haggard in the morning light, now the bright flush had faded from it.

"Don't know, I'm sure," drawled Bentham; "if it's luck, seems to me he keeps a stock in reserve, and draws upon it just when he wants it. Three o'clock; I'm off to bed. Fare you well, you two."

Bertie turned to Guy, and hooking his arm into his, they strolled together towards Jermyn Street, where Bertie had rooms.

"Come along, old fellow, we've had enough of this jawing: I'm awfully knocked up, and I want to turn in."

"You are looking seedy, Bertie," responded Guy.

Bertie laughed. "It's hard work, this London life—this social treadmill; it's my first season, and I've not got into training yet. But, Guy, I've not told you how glad I am to see you. Where do you hang out? Will you come to my rooms? I can give you a berth, I dare say."

"No, thank you; I've put up at Long's," replied Guy. "But I hope to see something of you all the same. I suppose you are knee-deep in engagements?"

"Hang the engagements! I can send them all to the wall,"

said Bertie. But beneath his tone of cordiality there was a certain restraint, a forced gayety, which Guy, knowing all, thought arose from a desire not to let the conversation drop out of commonplaces into personalities. "To-morrow—ah, yes. I thought there was something—I've promised to drive down to Hurlingham with Leath for the pigeon-shooting. After that—let me see—will you come and dine with me, Guy?"

"All right, Bertie," said the other, heartily, "but don't throw over any better thing for me—there'll be plenty of time for me to see you."

"No. Come to-morrow. Here we are. You won't come in, then? By-by, then; and—oh—I say, Guy, come at half-past six sharp, if you don't object to dining at such an unearthly hour; I've got a box for the 'Frivolity' to-morrow night, and the piece begins at eight."

"What's on there?" asked Guy, with would-be carelessness.

"Oh, a new piece—*La Belle Sorcière*—a cross between a ballet and a drama," answered Bertie.

And then he turned to put the key into the door, and Guy wended his solitary way to Long's with a heavy heart, and his mind full of anxious forebodings. If Bertie had begun like this, what hope was there that he could be saved from all the dangers and pitfalls that would beset him on his way through life? Heedless, careless, and wilful, Guy had known him to be; but utterly destitute of the common-sense, the common prudence, to save himself from becoming the prey of a designing woman, he had not thought him.

Even if he could be saved from this scrape—and Guy could not believe that he had gone so far as to be beyond saving—what hope was there for him in the future?

So Guy argued, not knowing the particulars of the case, only the bare outlines; not knowing the power of the woman who, according to Bentham's account, held Bertie in her chains; not knowing that the fascination of her beauty, together with the encouragement which she, who appeared to scorn all other

men, had for some reason of her own bestowed upon Bertie, was such as not one man in a hundred could have resisted.

Guy pitied Bertie's weakness; he shrank with horror from the thought of his name being coupled with this actress, not knowing how severely he had been tested, but resolved that his own strength, which had only been reserved because Bertie had no need of it, should come to his brother's aid, and that by some means, any means, he should be saved from this impending danger.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next day Guy Lawrence might have been seen wandering about town like an uneasy spirit, seeking rest and finding none. He was in a state of mind which made it impossible for him to be quiet; and yet, though he had many things to do, he could not make up his mind to do any of them; and so wandered aimlessly about the streets and the parks, now and then picking up an old acquaintance and stopping to exchange a few words, and then hurrying away as if he had some important business on hand, but never doing it.

The fact was, he could not settle to anything until he had seen Bertie and learnt from him how much truth there was in this report concerning him and an actress. That there was some, Guy could not doubt, for Bentham had seemed so assured on the subject, and he would not have repeated an idle and vague rumor with so much positiveness of conviction.

Moreover Guy was suffering the tortures of suspense and anxiety about another matter, which was necessarily and inextricably interwoven with this.

In all this time, nearly two years since the death of his mother, he had not got over his love for Kitty Lorton; and now he

was absolutely ignorant of what had become of her—where she was, or what she was doing.

He had never positively heard that the engagement between her and Bertie had come to an end, but he surmised that it was so. In reply to the few questions which he had asked of Bertie in his letters from abroad—and Guy's very anxiety had made him shy of asking many—he had merely learnt that on the death of her father she had gone to stay with Mrs. Hoare, and was well taken care of. He had searched in vain for her through the rooms, and felt certain that she had not been there on the previous evening; but something, some hesitation which was usually very foreign to Guy Lawrence, had held him back from asking his cousin anything about her. He thought he would wait and ask Bertie, but then the news which he had heard from Bentham had driven, for the moment, all other thoughts out of his head.

His intense anxiety for Bertie was paramount even over his love. Only in the quiet of the night, when he thought of it all, did he remember what this rumor involved. Surely it was not possible that Bertie should make his admiration and infatuation for an actress so prominent that it had become the talk of the town, if he had still been engaged to this girl? No, he could not believe it. Bertie might be reckless and weak—never so dishonorable as this. The engagement between them must have been broken, and it had probably been Kitty's own doing. She had done it in her pride, as she said she would. She had thrown away her only hope of a future home, and gone out to fight her own way in a world which would be too harsh and pitiless for her—poor little innocent, delicate girl! It made Guy Lawrence's heart sore to think of her as she might be at this moment: penniless, homeless, desolate, earning perhaps a bare subsistence by weary drudgery, while he had so much of this world's goods and could not give her any—could not give one iota of his abundance to her, who had nothing.

The mere thought that she was possibly free, that the barrier which existed between himself and her was broken down, set

Guy Lawrence's brain on fire with the old, mad, passionate love—the longing to be near her, to tell her all the truth, to tell her how his heart had ached for her all these weary months; how it had almost killed him to give her up to his brother; how nearly, on that April morning more than a year ago, he had broken through the silence to which he felt himself bound by every tie of duty and honor, and told everything; all the love and all the sorrow which had robbed his life of its happiness, and made it only a heavy burthen that must be borne. To be able to pour out his very soul in passionate pleadings for her forgiveness; to be able to confess the wrong he had done her in not telling her of his love long ago; to be able to tell her why he had kept silence, and how bitterly he had repented it ever since.

It could not be that this happiness was to be granted to him after all? Guy was something of a fatalist, and it seemed impossible to him to believe that his lot, which had been cast in shady places, would ever change; he did not dare hope that the sunlight which had so long been shut out from his heart and from his life, would ever burst through the darkness and shed brightness over the future.

He would not delude himself with hopes which would never be realized. It was more than possible that the engagement between his brother and Kitty Lorton still existed—that Bertie, though he had not been able to resist the fascinations of this actress, had only yielded her a passing admiration which had been greatly exaggerated by the *on dits* of the world, but had never reached Kitty Lorton's ears. It might be that she was not earning her living at all by the weary toils of governess, but was staying with friends until the time of her marriage.

Ah! the pang which shot through Guy's heart at that thought showed him that these new-born hopes had taken deeper root than he imagined.

And then again, even if she were free, alone in the world, and destitute of all other friends, could he, after all that had passed,

dare to address her with words of love? Remembering all, would she not take them only as a fresh insult, and repel them with the scorn and anger which she had shown to him ever since she had first believed him to be dishonorable and treacherous? would she not only treat him with disdain, and refuse to believe in a love which had made her a secondary consideration, and sacrificed her to the good of another? Racked and tormented by these thoughts, it was little wonder that Guy Lawrence could not rest. One minute he resolved to call on Mrs. Hoare and ask of her the tidings which he longed yet dreaded to hear; the next, he thought he would rather learn them in any other way—for she, with her sharp woman's eyes and womanly instinct, might guess his secret and read his anxiety in his looks.

That June day, with its cloudless sky and never-wearying sunshine, seemed as if it would never have an end, and Guy Lawrence found that there is nothing so tiring as aimless wanderings, nothing so tedious as watching for the hours to pass.

He made up his mind that there could not be any better opportunity for asking and hearing all the truth from Bertie than when he was dining with him, tête-à-tête. He would try to gain Bertie's confidence. What had he to fear in speaking honestly to him—had he ever tried to do anything but help him in all his scrapes? And he was ready to help him out of this last one—ay, and to fight his battles for him, again and again, as often as he needed help.

It was a great disappointment to Guy when he arrived in Jermyn Street to find that Leath had returned with Bertie from the pigeon-shooting and was going to stay to dinner. He arrived punctually at half-past six, and Bertie had not quite finished dressing, but sung out from an adjoining room that he "would be ready in no time." So Guy had to amuse himself with taking a survey of the luxurious room and the small specimen of humanity who lay stretched on a couch in the last stage of exhaustion.

"Awful work, pigeon-shooting! so tiring, you know, lifting

the gun and standing about, and all that. 'Pon my word, a few days of it would knock me up completely."

"You appear to be rather done up," remarked Guy, with a slight tinge of sarcasm in the way in which he surveyed the weak little figure before him.

"Eh? yes—I'm not so strong as you," with a survey of Lawrence's physical dimensions through his eye-glass. "Couldn't have stayed as you did that day at Aylesbury. By Jove! that was a plucky thing. I say, is your arm—the one that got smashed, you know—all right?"

"It's a little stiff—always will be. I can only bend it very slowly," answered Guy.

"It's your pistol arm, isn't it?" asked Leath.

"Yes, but that doesn't much signify, as I seldom or never fire one, and am not thinking of fighting a duel."

And then the door opened, and Bertie and Bob Bentham entered at the same minute. Guy thought to himself that it was evident Bertie did not care for a tête-à-tête with him, and had taken care to provide against it. He greeted his brother cordially, and they very soon sat down to a dinner which was served in first-rate style.

The conversation was not overflowing with brilliancy or bon-mots, but that was not to be expected; and Guy, finding that in much of the small talk he could take no share, because he was unacquainted with the people and things, the town-gossip and *esclandres*, which were the chosen topics, lapsed now and then into silence, and took note of things around him.

The room in which they sat very much resembled the one which Bertie had furnished in accordance with his own taste at Oxford. Very many of the same things were there, though the whole effect was even more costly, and spoke even more of unsparing expense than it had done before.

But there was one striking difference: all the gorgeously colored sketches of ballet-girls were gone, and over the chimney-piece, in the place of honor, hung the portrait of a woman.

It was a head, life-size—an exquisitely painted water-color.

Guy Lawrence could not see it well without slightly turning his head, and he did not care to have his notice of the picture observed and commented upon, for he felt he could not bring himself to ask whose it was, or to admire the talent of the artist, in the present company.

He felt that that face which smiled down on him with its exquisite, wonderful beauty, was the face of the woman who had singled out his brother to be the victim of her fascinations. He gave one upward glance at it, and the great slumbrous eyes seemed fixed on him with an evil light lurking under their heavy lids. He cursed the perfection of beauty which the picture revealed, and tried to forget it in the enjoyment of his dinner, and to get up some interest in the town talk that was going on around him; but though he withdrew his eyes, he could not withdraw his thoughts from the pictured loveliness of that woman's face. It seemed to haunt him with a vague remembrance, like the memory of a by-gone dream. He could not forget it, and he felt that he was growing every moment more unsociable and self-engrossed, and tried, not very successfully, to rouse himself.

"I hope you'll come with me to the theatre, if you've nothing better to do," said Bertie, as the dinner came to a close, and they were lighting up and sipping their café noir. There was a slight hesitation in his manner, which Guy construed into a desire that the invitation, which was almost unavoidably given, would be refused; but for reasons of his own he resolved to accept.

"Thank you, Bertie, it's a long time since I've been inside a theatre. I suppose I must try and do some of the London gayeties, unless I mean to be taken for a regular savage."

"Things are rather changed since you were here, eh?" asked Bentham.

"It is almost incredible how a few years will change all the people and streets in London. I scarcely saw one of the faces which used to be as familiar to me as my own when I spent a season in town some three or four years back."

"Haven't you been in London since then?"

"I have only passed through—sometimes spent a day or two *en passant*."

"There's always a lot of cads who suddenly appear no one knows whence. Make a great flare-up with their carriages and horses, opera-boxes, and powdered footmen, and as suddenly disappear—goodness knows where—and sink into utter oblivion. Cads who speculate, you know—make fortunes by some species of swindling, and then lose them again," soliloquized Bertie.

"People who are not cads manage to get through the money somehow," drawled Leath.

Bertie laughed.

"Does it hit home, Leath?"

"Well," was the response, "any way, it's a consolation to know that we're both in the same box."

Bertie turned uneasily; the conversation was drifting unpleasantly into personalities.

"I almost think we had better be going," he said, looking at the clock. "Guy, my brougham's at the door. Will you and Bentham go in it? and Leath and I will follow in a Hansom."

"I ordered my cab round here," said Leath.

"All right; after you, Guy," and Lawrence and Bentham went down the stairs, the former half angry at Bertie's ingenuity in avoiding him, half sorrowful at the thought that the brother whom he had cared for even too well should distrust him as he did.

Bertie turned when they had left the room, and hastily snatching up an exquisite bouquet of the most delicate rose-buds interspersed with maiden-hair ferns, which lay on a side table, followed Leath into his cab.

For a few moments there was silence between the two in the brougham.

"I saw you looking at that picture. It is her portrait," said Bentham, laconically, after they had proceeded some little distance.

"Is it like her?"

"No, it's not. It's merely the artist's own idea of a beautiful woman. It's not the woman herself. I wonder that Bertie can hang it on his walls. I heard him say once that it has a look of her about the eyes; and it has, but there the resemblance ends."

"It is marvellously beautiful," pondered Guy.

"I told you she was a stunner," said Bentham. "If you're going to try and get the better of her, you won't win through your adversary's weakness, I warn you, Lawrence. She beats her picture hollow. She has none of that spirituelle, ethereal beauty that the artist has endowed her with, but for animal, physical beauty, you might search the world through and not find her match."

Guy sighed.

"If I tried to save Bertie from marrying her, it would be an unequal combat, with all the power on one side," he said at length.

And then they reached the theatre, and they all entered the box—the next but one to the stage on the lower tier—together.

The *lever-du-rideau* was over, the drop-scene was down, and the orchestra were playing their best.

Bertie insisted on Guy taking a front seat, and seemed himself to prefer a chair placed in the back of the box and in the shadow of the curtain.

The house was crammed to suffocation, and the people were eagerly waiting for the beginning of the play and the appearance of the famous Estelle—the woman who by the display of her wonderful beauty, as much as by her singing and dancing—both far beyond the average—had made the new piece an unheard-of success, and brought down thunders of applause and showers of bouquets every night of her life, on her own triumphant head.

Guy waited almost as impatiently as the rest of the audience for her coming.

He glanced at Bertie, whose flushed cheeks and restless movements belied his feigned sleepiness, and then his eyes fell on the bouquet.

"What a gorgeous posy! Who's to be honored with that?" he said, with a smile. "I pity the fair recipient—it's so big it will almost crush her, with its weight of honor."

"I generally bring one to shy at the prettiest girl I see," answered Bertie.

"I don't think there's generally much doubt as to who will have it, Bertie," said Bentham.

"Oh! Estelle of course," responded Bertie, with would-be carelessness; "every one throws her a bouquet—it's the thing to do, you know."

"Wonder she isn't like the fellow—you remember—the Roman fellow who was smothered by the shower of cloaks," said Leath, with a feeble reminiscence of some old story learnt long ago in the days when he was crammed.

"Eh? what?" said Bentham. "No; don't know any Roman fellows—know plenty of Jews, I'm sorry to say."

"There's an awful Jew in that stage-box opposite," said Leath; "fingers blazing with diamonds, and all that sort of thing; he's after Estelle—goes there every night, and ogles her. Ugh! isn't he a beast, with his nose and his greasy beard? I couldn't touch him with a pair of tongs."

"I shouldn't mind touching some of his shekels of gold, though," said Bertie.

"Who is he?" asked Guy.

"Don't you know?" said Bentham. "What a thing it is to be a Cræsus. That's Leoni, the money-lender."

And then the music changed, and the curtain rose.

The scene was a fair, supposed to be held near a camp, and began of course with a dance, chiefly composed of girls in village dresses of some by-gone era, and soldiers in a variety of not very military costumes.

It was well got up, and through the brilliancy of the dresses and the vivacity and elegance of the dance, had a wonderful effect. There were many songs, and lastly came one describing the beauty and wonderful powers of a foreign woman who had suddenly appeared in the camp; who, from her fatal

powers of attraction, and from the magical manner in which she bewitched all who beheld her, had obtained the name of "La Belle Sorcière."

As the women listened to the tale, some shivering with fear, some possessed with a wild curiosity, the daylight slowly faded. The gay-colored lamps that hung on the branches of the trees and in the booths and stalls were lighted, and shed a lurid glare over the stage.

The singer ceased, and a hush of fear fell on those who had listened: the girls clung closer to their sweethearts, as if by their touch they would charm away the spell, and the men hung tenderly over them; when suddenly into their very midst sprang a woman, so wonderfully, strangely beautiful that they all shrank away with cries of "witch," "enchantress," "sorceress," and left her standing alone, as in a magic circle.

She stood there a moment, perfectly motionless, her eyes fixed on the ground. The red light fell on a face of marvellous beauty, on perfectly moulded, round, white limbs—revealed rather than hidden by the clouds of diaphanous drapery—on one shapely arm supporting a glittering tambourine.

And Guy Lawrence looking at her, knew her—knew that he looked on Celia Ragoni.

The music had sunk to a low tremolo, the voices that hissed at her had been hushed, when the stillness which enthralled the audience was suddenly broken; she gave a weird cry, flung her arms into the air, and sprang into a wild dance.

No wonder the peasants and soldiers held their breath, and watched her entranced; no wonder they shrank away, almost in terror, from the beautiful witch, who twisted and wreathed her fair white form in all the contortions of her strange, unearthly dance.

Slowly the spell began to work. One by one the men dropped their arms from where they had rested round some girlish waist or neck; little by little, slowly, unwillingly, as if drawn by some fatal magnetism which was beyond their power

to resist, they drew nearer to the circle where she danced. And she danced on, throwing her smiles and glances with unerring precision, first on one, then on another, till all had fallen captive to her charms. Some threw themselves prone on the ground, some knelt at her feet, some touched the hem of her dress with worshipping fingers, others kissed the green-sward where she had danced, and the women wailed and wept and stormed and raved in vain. "La Belle Sorcière" had woven her magic spells in every heart, set every brain on fire with her beauty. And then she paused, shot one triumphant glance over the scene, and the curtain fell.

The shouts and thunders of applause which broke from the assembled people, the cries and calls for "Estelle!" brought up the curtain once again.

The beautiful dancer came forward with a beaming smile, and for the first time glanced round the house.

Her eyes fell on the box where the brothers were seated—they rested one moment on Guy Lawrence's face: she gave a low cry, her face turned ghastly white, and she tottered as if she would have fallen, had not one of the actors rushed forward to support her.

Bertie started up with a cry which echoed hers, but the curtain fell and hid her from sight. He seemed as if in his excitement he would almost have called out to her from the box. Guy pushed him back by main force.

"She has bewitched you indeed if she can make you forget where you are," he muttered.

They stood and glared at each other, Guy with a face almost as white as his brother's.

"What was the matter with her?" asked Bertie, wildly.

"She's only overdone—that infernal dancing," said Ben-tham, and they all turned again towards the stage.

There was a sudden hush. The manager had come before the lights, and was explaining that Mademoiselle Estelle had suffered from a slight faintness, brought on by the heat of the weather and the exertion of dancing, but now she was perfectly

recovered, and the piece would proceed. The music struck up, the house subsided into tranquillity, but Guy Lawrence looking round found that Bertie had left the box.

"Gone behind, to inquire after the fair creature, I suppose," said Bentham, in answer to Guy's look.

"New sensation this," drawled Leath. "Shouldn't wonder if she did it for effect."

"It's not very wonderful she should knock up," observed Guy, feeling that he must say something. "She dances with more power, more force, than any woman I have ever seen."

"She's more like a witch than a woman," muttered Bentham; "piece suits her to a T; was written for her—there's nothing in it really but the situations—and the music is good. Here's Bertie! Where have you been, young 'un? Is Estelle in form again?"

"All right, I believe," was the answer; but it was easy to guess from the ominous cloud which had gathered on Bertie's face that he was not much better informed on the subject than when he had left the box.

A constrained silence fell on them all. Guy sat with his face resting on one hand and turned towards the house. His thoughts were in the wildest confusion; he felt as if he must be dreaming—that it could not be possible that Celia Ragoni, the girl who had so long lived on his charity, and Estelle, the woman who held Bertie in her toils, were one and the same. Yet undoubtedly it was she. The same graceful, beautiful woman who had stood before him in her flowing robes in *Laburnum Villa*, had just now danced in semi-nudity on a public stage.

Surely if she had known that Bertie was his brother—and she must have known it—she might have spared him, if it were only out of gratitude to the man who had saved her in her childhood.

But then Guy remembered that the gratitude of which Celia had so much boasted, had all turned to anger when he refused to help her to go on the stage. He remembered how she had

deceived him and led him in her letters to believe that she was still at the house where he had placed her. The very money which he had sent so regularly for her support had probably been used by her as a means of advancing her ambition; perhaps her encouragement of Bertie had been a species of the same perverseness, an intentional display of power to one who had resisted and opposed her. Guy's thoughts, which were none of the pleasantest, were broken short by the re-rising of the curtain.

In this scene the soldiers are supposed to be stationed in a town which is besieged. "*La Belle Sorcière*," though she is an inmate of this town, has a lover who is a young officer in the enemy's camp, to whom she pays stolen visits, disguised as a page. The manner in which she obtains ingress and egress to and from the beleaguered town, she preserves a secret even from the man whom she visits. She will not betray her friends, and she will not desert them in their time of need. She plays the part of ministering angel to the sick and wounded among the soldiers, who half worship her, half fear her as some unearthly being, and she steals away from them to brief sweet interviews with the man whom she adores with all the passionate fervor of her nature.

Sitting in his tent, the proportions of her perfect figure clearly defined in her page's dress, her head resting on his breast, her face softened into tenderness, Estelle looked yet more beautiful than she had done before.

And then she sang a passionate love-song, and her splendid voice wailed and thrilled through every heart. So sweet was the voice that Guy, taking a swift glance at his brother, could scarcely feel surprised at the intensity of emotion betrayed in his face.

There is a call to arms! Estelle helps with trembling fingers to buckle on her lover's armor, and then she bids him adieu, and the curtain falls as they are standing together in a pose, very much resembling the attitude that Millais has forever made famous in his beautiful picture of the Huguenots. Nothing can be more touching in its exquisite tenderness than

the face which "La Belle Sorcière" raises to her lover's—the face which had so lately flashed with wild excitement, with reckless gayety.

After that there were various interludes, by-plays which had no interest for Guy, because Estelle took no prominent part in the performance.

There is a jealous lover who, maddened by the charms of Estelle and hatred against his rival, resolves to betray them both. And then there comes a scene in which Fernande, the young officer, is arrested on the charge of harboring a spy, who in the dress of a page passes backwards and forwards between his tent and the besieged town. He is tried and condemned to die. Overcome by the fear of death and by the entreaties of his friends, he pleads for life. He avers that his visitor is a woman, a sorceress who has bewitched him, and that he is an unwilling victim to her fatal arts—he is under a spell which he has no power to break.

Those who judge him are willing to believe him, for he is a favorite amongst them, and their belief in and dread of witchcraft make them too ready to hear him. They watch for "La Belle Sorcière," and capture her when she comes to pay a visit to her lover. She is dragged before her judges and learns of what she is accused, and who is her accuser.

Her agony, her horror, her despair at the discovery of Fernande's perfidy are almost terrible to witness. It is hard to remember they are only acted—they are so real. She is condemned to be burnt as a witch: they know no pity for her youth, they turn away their eyes lest they should be bewitched by her beauty. She must die—a shameful, horrible death.

Again, in another scene, she is confronted with her betrayer, and in her fury and scorn, her sudden meltings into pitying tenderness and passionate love, Estelle attains almost to the perfection of dramatic art.

Finally she is dragged on the stage amid the crowd of enraged soldiers, through the hissing and cursing of an infuriated mob—to die. A tattered serge dress is tied round her waist

by a rope, her luxuriant hair streams over her bare shoulders, her beautiful face, white as marble, is distorted with agony, as they tie the rough cords round her wrists. She gives a wild cry, she looks around and prays for mercy—and her voice and her words are so strangely pathetic that there is a hush even among her furious accusers. Fernande, who has been hidden among the crowd, bursts through the people, and makes his way to the front of the stage; he throws himself at her feet and confesses all—his cowardice, his treachery, and his dishonor. He addresses the assembled multitude, and swears by Heaven that she is no witch—only a beautiful woman whom he has loved, and prays that he may die in her stead.

He prays in vain. They cry that she has bewitched him again, that he is under the influence of the evil eye, that he knows not what he says. They try to drag him from her, but he clings to her with the strength of despair. She lies in his arms. She looks up into his face with ineffable tenderness; she murmurs that she forgives him, that she is happy to die so. The executioners tear them apart. But she has swooned; she lies upon the ground in a dead faint. Fernande throws himself by her, and raises her head. She looks once in his face, and—dies.

“Best thing she could do,” growled Guy. “They couldn’t burn her on the stage.”

“She’s a devilish good actress,” said Bentham. Ay—so it seemed. The cries that broke from the audience would have gladdened the ears of the greatest artiste that ever lived, and they brought triumph to the heart of Celia Ragoni—the passionate triumph which gleamed from her eyes as she fixed one long look on Guy Lawrence’s face, when she made her final curtsy and retired.

They all strolled together from the box, and waited at the door for the carriages.

Bertie turned to Guy.

“Good-night, Guy! You and Bentham can have the

brougham to take you where you please. I'm going to call on a friend, and then I shall look in at the Club. I shall see you to-morrow, I suppose?"

Guy mechanically held out his hand, and with a brief "good-night" to the other men, Bertie disappeared.

Bentham and Guy drove almost in silence to Long's Hotel; and the latter refusing an invitation to go to the Club, watched the brougham drive away.

He stood at the door for a few moments, lighting a cigar, and then turned his face towards the Park and walked slowly on.

Of what use to try and rest? He felt, in the terrible whirl of conflicting thoughts, as if sleep would never visit his eyes again.

It was little wonder, considering all the events of these two days, that it seemed to him as if he were hunted and pursued by a terrible fatality.

The good that he would have done had all turned to such terrible evil. But for him, and his rash charity, this woman, Celia Ragoni, would never have been here to cross Bertie's path and ruin every hope of his future life. But for the mad sacrifice of his own love to Bertie's, Kitty Lorton would not be deserted and homeless now.

Yet surely in these two actions of his life he had been guided by no other motive than the desire to do good, and benefit others even at his own cost. How was it that he had failed? How was it that life was all such a tremendous and egregious mistake?

Looking up into the clear evening sky, where the pale stars shone dimly through the semi-darkness, Guy Lawrence felt that though the world was fair enough, yet none of its fairness was for him.

The great and wonderful gift of existence had not been bestowed upon him for the enjoyment he might find therein.

Love and happiness—the tempting fruit which had hung before his eyes—had at the first touch turned to dearest ashes within his hand. The flowers which had seemed to bloom so

brightly in the distance, when plucked, had he not found them to be steeped in the poison of bitterness and despair?

To him had been given intense powers of loving, and that rare quality—faithfulness; but it had been his fate since earliest childhood to see the love which should have been his, given to another, and his devotion and self-sacrifice had only brought evil on those whom he would have served.

What wonder that he was ready to cry out in the very bitterness of his heart, "Why was I born?"—"For what end, for what purpose, was I endowed with this vitality which I cannot throw away, and which I cannot use with any benefit to myself or others?"

Such a time came to him as probably comes to all of us, at some period when the very shadow of despair is over us, when it is vain to struggle against the depression which weighs us down even to the ground, when through an accumulation of adverse circumstances it seems impossible that the light of hope can ever break through the blackness of darkness that is over all things.

Guy Lawrence threw himself down on a seat in the now deserted Park, and sitting there with folded arms and his head sunk on his breast, gave himself up to his thoughts.

For a long while he did not attempt to fight against the despair which had overtaken him. When he had first heard that Bertie, foolish and boylike, had become the captive of a celebrated actress, it had seemed to Guy to be bad enough; but now that he knew who the actress was, knew all the hardness of her ambitious and grasping nature, he felt how vain it was to hope that she would give up any smallest part of the triumph she had won. He felt how useless it would be for him to attempt to combat the influence which a woman clever and beautiful as Celia Ragoni would have gained over Bertie Deverell.

And then he had failed so signally hitherto in all that he had attempted, that he had not the will to try any more.

But other thoughts came after a while. Guy Lawrence was not the man to give in, even though the case seemed desperato.


He would not rest until he had done something; he would go to Bertie and learn the worst from him, learn how far he had given his honor into her keeping, and then speak to him, tell him all he knew of this woman—Celia Ragoni, Estelle, or whatever she chose to call herself.

No false glamour should rest over her antecedents—Bertie should know her for just what she was; and surely it would be hard if he who had thought so much, cared so much for this younger brother, should have no influence, no power over him! And if he failed with Bertie, Guy Lawrence knew that there remained yet another chance—though it was but a slender thread on which to hang a hope—the possibility that Celia Ragoni might recognize his claim to ask a favor of her—that some small remembrance of the gratitude of which she had once spoken in such strong words, might induce her to spare his brother.

It was strange with what a repugnance Guy Lawrence thought of this woman in whose life he had once so much interested himself, how he shrank from ever seeing her again; but he was resolved to fight the battle even unto the end, and not to let slip the smallest chance of victory.

When he rose from the seat and looked at his watch, he found that he had been there an hour. Bertie would probably not have returned yet from the Club; should he go to Jermyn Street and wait for him there? If he missed this opportunity of speaking to him, it might be long before he found another, for he knew well that Bertie had the will to avoid him, and would, if he could. Moreover, the case was desperate. Guy had read in his brother's face that evening how far things had gone with him, and felt certain that his honor would soon be pledged, if it was not already. He must speak to him ere it was too late. And he turned his face resolutely forwards, determined to do his best, though he had little hope of success.

CHAPTER XV.

UY LAWRENCE had waited some time in Bertie's room. The daylight was shining brightly through the open window, for he had drawn up the blind to admit every breath of air that was stirring.

It was a close, sultry June night, and the flare of the gas-lights made the room almost unbearable, and shone with a lurid glare on the fair woman's face that hung on the walls.

Guy rose to go. It was useless to wait for Bertie any longer. If he came now he would not probably be in the mood to listen to advice. Guy remembered this now. His anger and impatience had somewhat cooled down after this long waiting, and he rose, tired and weary with his sad vigil, to seek the rest he began so much to need. But he met Bertie on the threshold.

"Hullo, Guy! what in the name of Fortune—Are you a somnambulist? And is this your usual time for paying morning calls?" was the greeting.

"Well, I was wakeful—'tish't the sort of night for sleep—so I thought I'd come round and have a chat with you, and finding you weren't here, I collapsed into a chair, where I've been ever since," answered Guy, with an elaborate attempt to appear careless.

"Deuced close night!" exclaimed Bertie, throwing himself on a sofa close to the window. "Don't go, Guy; I'm in no hurry to turn in. Have another weed? and hand me some seltzer, there's a good fellow. I'm too done up to move."

Bertie's face was excessively flushed, and he spoke fast and excitedly.

Guy looked at him gravely, and doubted the advisability of staying, when he felt that he could not speak without in some way referring to the subject which was uppermost in his mind.

"It's so difficult to find you in the daytime, and it's so long since we've seen each other," he began, and then there was a *pause*. "Bertie," he continued, looking up suddenly, "I'm a

bad one at beating about the bush : I had something to say to you, and I could not rest without saying it."

Bertie glanced rapidly at Guy, and then, quietly knocking the ash off his cigar with apparent calmness, "What's in the wind now?" he said. "Is Erlesmere burnt down; are you going to get spliced; do they want to make you Lord Mayor; or what other fearful calamity is weighing on your anxious mind?"

"In one word—is the rumor, which couples your name with that woman's, true or false?" asked Guy, half rising from his chair and pointing with upraised hand to the ever-smiling pictured face.

Bertie flushed crimson.

"Upon my soul, Guy, I won't submit to this. I'll stand a good deal from you, but I'm not a child in leading-strings. It's almost time you began to remember that. I can't help your interference in some of my concerns; but leave *her* alone," he answered angrily, "and leave me alone."

"Things have gone far enough," said Guy, "if this woman has power to make you turn against me so readily." Then he added, bitterly, "Report does speak truly for once then: you are being fooled by this woman?"

Bertie replied, with forced calmness, "Any report that joins my name to that of the most beautiful woman in town, does me too much honor; but we will drop the subject, if you please—I admit no one's right to speak of her, or her affairs, to me!"

Guy had risen and was pacing up and down the room.

"Do I understand you rightly?" he said, pausing in his walk. "On any other subject I may venture to speak to you, but on this, which most concerns your honor and your happiness, I, your brother, must hold my peace? Listen, Bertie: if you will not hear me as your brother, let me speak as your guardian; let me give you, not my own view of this matter, but the view which every man of the world would take of it."

"It was an infernal delusion that ever made you my guar-

dian," retorted Bertie, flaming with unrestrained passion. "Thank Heaven, I shall soon be free from your cursed interference."

"Have I ever abused the small authority I may have over you? Have I ever shown anything but a true interest in your concerns? Have I ever pestered you with advice, or done anything to give you an excuse for speaking like this?" said Guy, trying to master his rising agitation and speak calmly. "On the contrary, Bertie, I care too much what becomes of you to let you go your own way to ruin without saying a word."

"I dare say I seem awfully ungrateful," said Bertie, half ashamed at the remembrance of all he owed to his brother; "but I am not, really; only you must not speak of what you cannot understand."

"I understand enough to see pretty clearly that this woman has power to make a fool of you—has power even to make you marry her if she pleases."

Bertie's face crimsoned again, but he did not speak, and Guy went on: "Is it possible that you, well born, highly gifted, with all the world before you, can mean to give the name which your father and mother held in highest honor into the keeping of an actress and adventuress, sprung from the very dregs of the people, who nightly bares her limbs and displays herself for gold; a base woman who is the talk of the town—the—"

"It's a lie!" screamed Bertie, springing from the sofa, white with rage. "I would kill anybody who dared to tell so foul a lie. Have you nothing better to do than to repeat the slanders which are sure to attach to a beautiful woman in her position? I would stake my soul she is as pure as my own mother."

"I believe it is possible that in deed she may be, though the world says otherwise," responded Guy. "She is too cold, too *intrigante*, to give herself for less than her proper value. In plain words, she'd never be a man's mistress when she knows

that if she plays her cards properly she may be his wife. But is it possible, voluntarily, to choose the life she has chosen, to feel no shame at appearing in public as she appears, and yet be pure-minded—fit for your wife?”

“I have told you,” exclaimed Bertie, passionately, “that you speak of what you do not understand; you repeat the trumped-up lies you have picked up during the day you have spent in London. What can you know about it? Shall I tell you the truth—not for my own sake, but for hers—that you may no longer repeat these slanders? She is as well born as I am. She is the daughter of a poor Italian lady—a Contessa in her own country—and when her mother died she was forced to go on the stage through dire necessity; it was not her own choice—she had no other means of living.”

Guy almost laughed. “And she told you this?” he asked.

“No, she did not tell it me. They are well-known facts. I heard them before I saw her. I am a gentleman, and would not ask a lady of her antecedents; and she is too true a lady to boast of her birth. I alluded to it once in her presence, but she said scarcely anything.”

“Ah! I thought she’d scarcely tell you that. Cel—Estelle, I mean—is not the woman to indulge in a story which is sure to be found out. She must have known that sooner or later you would hear the truth. You have told me all you know of this woman’s antecedents; now, shall I tell you all I know? and I think you will find I am a little better informed than you.”

Bertie stared in incredulous amazement. Guy hesitated a moment, and then he spoke again—

“It is nearly ten years ago now, that a certain little Italian girl sang and danced for money in the streets of Rome. She was in the charge of an old Frenchman, who starved her, beat and neglected her, till she was very near to death. One day a friend of mine, an Englishman, who had long noticed and pitied the child, felt he could bear the sight of her miseries no longer. To make a long story short, he rescued her, found the

old man had no claim upon her—she was the daughter of a ballet-girl, one of the lowest and most disreputable of her kind, who had died from misery and want in a garret—got rid of him forever, and brought the child to England. Then my friend placed her in a school where she would be well educated, thinking that in the future she would be able to earn her own living.” Guy paused for a moment, and then he went on: “Last August twelvemonth I saw this protégée of my friend’s. She was a child no longer. She had become a beautiful woman; but she had grown hard, cold, and worldly—setting no value on her beauty but as a means of winning money and admiration. She had gained a bad character among those with whom she had lived, and she made no good impression on me. Bertie, I have never seen that woman again until this evening. Celia Ragoni, the dancer’s daughter, and Estelle, the actress, are one and the same.”

“I don’t believe you; there is some mistake,” stammered Bertie, convinced, nevertheless, by the earnestness of Guy’s words, that he had listened to the truth.

“There is none, Bertie; believe me, I tell you the truth. I have only told you this because I saw you were laboring under a delusion as to this actress’s real origin. I should not have told it to any one else. If Celia chooses to keep her former life a secret, she is welcome as far as I—I mean my friend—is concerned. She behaved with great ingratitude to him. She chose this life in opposition to his wishes—though surely he had some right, after all he had done, to express a wish as to her future: and, worse than all, she deceived him—led him to believe that she had given up the thought of it.”

“What right had he to try and control her?” muttered Bertie between his teeth.

“The right of the interest he had taken in her,” replied Guy. “And she would have been a better woman, in all probability, if she had taken his advice.”

“How absurdly you speak,” retorted Bertie, “as if actresses and sin were synonymous. I hate such cant.”

"I mean nothing of the sort. Heaven forbid that I should say so. I believe that there are women on the stage as good and pure and true as it is possible for them to be under the circumstances, for I hold that you cannot touch pitch and be quite undefiled. But these women have friends and relations to guard them, they are more retiring and modest to start with, and they do not all appear in the costume Estelle appeared in to-night, or dance as she did."

There was a silence. Guy had seated himself, and was leaning on the table, with his head resting on one hand, facing his brother. Bertie, his face red, his eyes burning, a heavy scowl on his forehead, had thrown himself back again on the sofa, and was plucking the white rose that had adorned his button-hole into a thousand pieces. Guy looked up and spoke suddenly—"Tell me the truth, Bertie. Is this the woman you would choose for your wife?"

"I will tell you the truth; you have driven me to it," cried Bertie, raising himself, his face convulsed, his voice choked with passion. "It may be that I might not have chosen an actress for my wife, but my love for this woman is beyond all control. If she were all that you say, if I knew her to be wicked and worthless, I would still marry her; I would give up everything—everybody for her." Guy dropped his face on his hands. "Remember you have forced me to tell you this. I would have spared you if I could," continued Bertie, excitedly. "Tell me any lies about her that you please, you will only drive me closer to her; for if all the world calumniates her, the more need that I should stick to her—I, who know her to be pure and good and noble. They call her cold, and I glory in it, for I know it is to me only she is kind."

Guy raised his face.

"May I ask if she is equally devoted?"

"I do not see that you have any right whatever to ask. If she hesitates to marry me, it is solely on my account, because she knows what people like you will say about it."

"She has promised to marry you, then?" asked Guy, still speaking in a hard, suppressed tone.

"I've reason to believe that she loves me. I am the only man she shows any real favor to. I believe that she will marry me. I would shoot myself if she didn't," responded Bertie, speaking half to himself; then turning suddenly on Guy, "What right have you to put me through this cross-examination? Have you almost done?"

"I have only one more question to ask you—one that I think I have a right to ask: What has become of Kitty Lorton? I presume you have broken off your engagement with her?" answered Guy, very coldly.

"I suppose you will accuse me of behaving badly to her now?" retorted Bertie, scarcely knowing what he said in his passion. "It may be a disappointment to you to hear that—the—I mean that I am not quite as black as your fancy paints me. It was Kitty Lorton's own doing that we separated. However glad I may be of my freedom now, I was not then; and moreover did what not one man in a hundred would have done. When her father died, I wrote to her and offered to marry her then—not from love, for the transient boyish love had all died out—but because she was friendless, and I was in some degree bound to do so in honor: and she refused again to marry me, in more unmistakable terms than she had done before. So that sin at least you can't lay at my door."

"You can scarcely blame me if I did," said Guy, with a slight flush on his brown face. "You have chosen to keep me in the dark about it. I don't mean to retaliate, Bertie, but times do alter so—things do not change so quickly with me. It seems but a little while ago you asked my help in that matter, and told me you loved her; now you are raving of your love for another woman."

"I mistook a boyish fancy for love," Bertie muttered, resting his head wearily on his hand, and his face, surrounded with the curly golden hair, looked strangely old and worn in the bright garish light that fell on it from the open window. "I'm

not much of a one to talk of these sort of things, and it would probably be as unintelligible to you as Arabic would be to me, if I told you of the intense love I have for Estelle. Guy, I usen't to be quite a heathen, but I'd sell my soul to-morrow for that woman."

Guy shuddered. Remembering all the love his mother had borne this boy, the care he had vowed to take of him, it almost sickened him to hear such words from his lips; and through all the horror and despair there came wild thoughts of Kitty—Kitty free—that made Guy's heart beat thick and fast, and set his brain on fire; but he tried to crush them. What time was it to think of himself and his own love when Bertie was rushing headlong to ruin, and must be saved? But how? What was he to say to him—to do for him?

It never occurred to Guy, as it might have done to some more practical men in his position, to ask Bertie how he, who had so little but what he received from himself, the elder brother and sole inheritor of the wealth of the Lawrences, intended to make a marriage without his approval.

If the idea of using this argument had passed through Guy's head he would have rejected it immediately. He would have felt that he could not use this advantage which fortune had given him, over his brother, as a means of forcing him to compliance with his own wishes; moreover, he knew that to threaten would have been the sure way to lose any influence he had over Bertie—the sure way to make his young brother set him at defiance.

Guy Lawrence thought and thought—words seemed so useless, arguments so hopeless. At last he looked up and spoke suddenly.

"Bertie, I feel it is only throwing away words to speak to you now. As well try to convince a madman of his own insanity, as you of the utter ruin of such a love as this."

"Not at all," with a reckless laugh. "I know it's a madness, but it's one I'll stick to."

"Bertie, Bertie, what can I say to you?" said Guy, rising

ld have said to this—she, who loved you so.
o you of myself—of anything I've done for
knows it's been little enough—but, Bertie, if
n on your consideration I would urge it no
nd solely because this woman is an actress, but l
hat I have proved her to be—hard, cold, and s
lmed by one passionate desire for admiration—
as would ruin any man's life.”

's head had sunk on his hands, but now he start
do not know her.”

now her too well, but I don't hope to convince
l prove the truth of my words some day, when y
ie is.” Guy spoke slowly and sadly. He sto
utes by Bertie's side, looking down on him, fl
turned and walked to the door. His hand was
hesitated, came back a few steps, and stood
face white and set. And then he spoke hurriedly

“Bertie, you think perhaps that I oppose
rily to your wishes—that I have no sympathy
r you; you wouldn't think that if you knew
ink I will tell you, though I never thought a w

the manner of the man who spoke them with such quiet dignity, there thrilled an infinite pathos.

"You? *You* loved Kitty?" ejaculated Bertie. "Good Heavens, Guy! what can you mean? It seems so incredible, so impossible."

"Does it seem so absurd that I should love any one? Ay, I don't look much like a lover for a young girl," somewhat bitterly, and with a glance at his own reflection in an opposite mirror—at the deep-scored lines, the white streaks in hair and beard, the haggard eyes. "I wasn't so bad then. I thought once I might have won her love, but I never spoke to her, because you loved her—at least you told me so."

"Guy, Guy, what have I done? I never knew it, never dreamt of it; but it isn't too late. Kitty is here, at Clara Hoare's house. I don't believe she ever loved me—perhaps—"

"Stop, Bertie! It is not for this I told you of my folly, only because—"


"I know everything you would say. For Heaven's sake leave me alone. I can, I ought to bear a lot from you, but this is too much."

Guy turned away.

"Good-by," he said, pausing a moment at the door. "I won't fight you in the dark, so I warn you I'll do my best—all I know—to prevent this marriage; and I swear that I will prevent it if it lies in my power." And then he was gone, out into the bright morning light and the silent streets, with a tumult in his heart, a terrible unrest that mocked at the idea of sleep.

Tortured by a remorseful feeling that he had not fulfilled the trust which had been laid upon him, that if he had taken better care, if he had not been so afraid of seeming to watch and spy upon his brother, this would not have happened; tormented by sudden rushes of a hope that was more sickening in its uncertainty than a despair that had been certain, how was it possible for Guy Lawrence to rest?

CHAPTER XVI.

HE following morning Guy Lawrence strolled into the Park, and made his way towards the well-dressed, languid, *dilettante* crowd that thronged from "Booby Corner" to Albert Gate. He had two objects in view—to find out how Kitty Lorton came to be staying at the Hoares', and to discover the address of Celia Ragoni, alias Estelle the actress.

The first Bertie could tell him, and the Row at mid-day was the most likely place to find him. As to the last, half the men in London would know the retreat of such a *lionne* of the *couliesses*. But though Guy had sauntered some distance, he had not come across a single acquaintance with whom he was sufficiently intimate to stop and discuss such matters. He felt strangely lonely in that crowd, few of the faces seemed familiar to him. He had been a wanderer so long, and time had wrought great changes in this kaleidoscope of fellow-beings; it was almost saddening to feel so like an alien in their midst. It was a great relief to him therefore when he espied Bentham, stretched on an iron chair, with his hat tilted forward to shade his eyes, languidly smoking a cigar.

"Hollo, Bentham! how are you?"

"Done up—almost at my last gasp," replied Bentham, as he extended a hand lazily to Guy.

"Not from over-exertion, I'll bet. What have you been doing?"

"Doing, my dear Lawrence? Existing; and if that isn't exertion enough to kill a fellow with the thermometer at ninety, I don't know what is."

Guy laughed as he threw himself into a vacant chair.

"Aren't you rather inconsistent in your remarks? I was wondering how a fellow could kill himself through existing."

"Oh don't be so confoundedly logical. Who can always stick to truth? Rotten Row's not the bottom of a well. Deuced soon that well would be pumped out if everybody drew

upon it. No, *mon ami*, that sort of tippie's too insipid for the present taste. Society goes in for stimulant, prefers Champagne Mousseux, though it's made of gooseberries, to the purest draught that ever came from—what is it?—'limpid streams.' Look at little Teddy Fanshawe, there—dark man on the gray horse hanging over pretty little woman by the rails. He is the greatest gossip in the clubs. He's telling her how some poor beggar's going to the dogs or some other fellow's come into a fortune, or, no—she looks pleased—then the mischief's about a woman—sure sign, you know, when a woman laughs. Then look at old Lady Telletaile—see how her confounded old tongue's wagging; something new and nasty from the Divorce Court, no doubt. It's the case with 'em all, my dear fellow; they live upon scandal, and if the world stuck to truth and stopped the supplies, they'd starve."

"There's always plenty going on, I should imagine, to meet the demand, without falling back upon fiction."

"Exactly; but what goes on is known to all the world an hour afterwards—thanks to the papers—and so becomes stale news: to be original it's necessary to invent. Pshaw! there's not a single being in this crowd who wouldn't tell a lie to make a *mot*, or slander his dearest friend to flavor a scandal."

"You have become quite a cynic, Bentham," laughed Guy as he lighted a cigar; "the Diogenes of the nineteenth century. How is it you've left your tub and cabbage-leaves, eh? You might growl till you were tired there."

"Come out for—what is it?—ozone, and to see the two fine sights that Vanity Fair can show—horses and women."

"By the bye, speaking of horses, has Bertie been riding to-day?"

"Yes, saw him half an hour ago on a bright bay mare—wonderfully nice thing she was too."

"How many horses does he keep, do you know?" asked Guy, looking slightly serious.

"Can't say, exactly; there's his pair of chestnuts, a gray for night-work, a park hack, and I don't know which of his hunt

ers he has kept, but I think he's got a couple. Then, you know, besides these, he and Leath have got a team of roans between them."

Guy bit his lips, and a shade of vexation came over his face.

"They are all worth money, too," continued Bentham, "cost him high prices, I expect." He paused for a moment, then turned to Guy. "I say, Lawrence, is the young one coming into much tin? Because if he doesn't, it strikes me he'll come to grief."

"Why do you think so?" asked Guy, hastily.

"Why? Well, the style of his *ménage*, and the pace he's going. Look here, you know, Lawrence," Bentham continued, lolling back in his chair and crossing his legs, "it's no affair of mine, and it seems rather sneaky to speak to you of these things; but the young 'un's always been a pet of mine, and I shouldn't like him to go to the dogs."

"It would be a real kindness to him and to me to tell me why you think all this," said Guy, earnestly. "I paid all his debts when he left college; he hasn't had time to do very much harm yet, I should think."

"I don't know. Master Bertie has a wonderful talent for getting rid of money. Got into a bad set too—Leath, Pearce, and Co. Leath's a fool and only dangerous that way, but Pearce bleeds him at cards and billiards—pretty freely too. Then that team leads to no end of Richmond dinners and demi-monde accompaniments, which mean the choicest wines, the rarest fruits, and everything that costs most money. And then, you know, last, but by no means least, Estelle: the ear-rings, bracelets, and things of that sort they say he gives her, would fill a Bond Street window."

"She's not over particular then—accepts men's presents, and all that?"

"My dear fellow," said Bentham, opening his eyes, "who ever knew a dancer who didn't? Do you imagine that her salary pays for the bijou house in Curzon Street, the brougham and steppers, the diamonds and laces that are the very soul and

essence of the beautiful Estelle! *Supristi!* Have you really quite forgotten the world and the ways thereof?"

"I might have known it—they are all alike," muttered Guy, savagely. "I couldn't expect that she would be an exception."

"Understand, I don't mean to insinuate anything against her morals—*au contraire*, she's fearfully proper—keeps an old woman, sheep-dog, you know—on purpose to take care of her, dear innocent lamb; never appears in public without her. But she's the very devil with men! Twists them round her finger; fools them to any extent; cleans them out, and then throws them over. She's as hard as granite, as calculating as a Jew, and as vain as—I know nothing with which to compare 'La Belle Sorcière's' vanity—it's incomparable, insatiable."

"If she's so cold and heartless, what's the meaning of her penchant for Bertie? You say she shows him some sort of preference?"

"Can't say," answered Bentham, languidly; "never attempt to fathom women's motives. Means to marry him, I suppose."

"Marry him?" cried Guy, hastily turning his chair.

"Yes, of course. No doubt she could get scores of men with more tin than Bertie, but they are cads, and wouldn't suit her book. She's ambitious and wants to get an entrée into society, and she thinks as Mrs. Deverell she could manage it."

"Does she?" muttered Guy, knitting his brows. "He shall never marry her—I'd rather see him dead."

And there was a silence, and after a while Guy rose and turned to go.

"Good-by, Bentham," he said briefly, as he held out his hand.

"By-by, old fellow! Don't fret about the young one; he'll pull through it all."

After he had gone a few steps, Guy turned back.

"Bentham, do you know that woman's address?"

"Estelle? No. — Curzon Street," with a slight elevation of the eyebrows.

"Thank you;" and Guy pushed his way resolutely through the crowd, and left the Park and the gay idlers behind him. He had made up his mind. He would go to this woman. Having failed with Bertie he would try her—he would not let the smallest chance slip through his fingers—but he was in no fit mood to face her yet.

Guy Lawrence was determined that Celia Ragoni should not read in his face any traces of the agitation that was in his heart. He had some fear, some idea which could scarcely be put into words, that to Bertie's relationship to himself might be traced part of the encouragement which she had shown to the boy; that because he, Guy Lawrence, had wounded her vanity, had known her in the days of her poverty and misery, she had tried her power on his brother, willing to show him that she had not overrated it.

It might be that he was wrong, but if Celia was nursing up some triumph of this sort, Guy felt that the worst thing he could do would be to let her see that he dreaded her power—she was just the woman to use it remorselessly.

No, he would not go to see her just yet; he would wait a few hours until he felt better able to meet her with a smiling face. He had resolved that if it were in any way possible he would discover from her whether she loved Bertie or not, and for this end he must make himself agreeable to her—no very difficult matter, from all he had heard; it is so easy to please a vain, ambitious woman for a short time.

So he went back to his hotel. On the table lay a note from Bertie; he tore it open:—

"DEAR GUY,—You asked me about Kitty Lorton. I don't know whether you heard me say she is in Grosvenor Square, at Clara's. She is a sort of governess there. She'll be glad, no doubt, to see an old friend.

"Yours ever,
"BERTIE."

Kitty a governess! then it was true: she was dependent, friendless, homeless, among strangers. Poor little girl!—so light-hearted, so merry in the old days. What a change for her!

How well Guy recalled the picture which was forever graven on his memory, of the girl who rode through the wood with the sunlight falling on her chestnut hair and her blue habit, and the trees forming an arch over her graceful head.

How the merry laugh rang on his ears still; how the bright blush which dyed her face as she caught sight of him still brought an answering flush to his own at the mere remembrance.

How could he bear the thought of that little head bent wearily over torn copy-books; that soft childish hand drilling rebellious fingers over dreary exercises, that ringing, merry voice raised to the note of command? The picture was so intensely incongruous and painful.

Guy Lawrence forgot to be grateful for the fact that Kitty's lot was much better than it might have been—that she had fallen among friends. He only remembered that she, delicately reared, sensitively nurtured, had been left to fight her way in a world of which she knew practically little or nothing. Why had he not known it sooner? Why had he been kept in ignorance? Why had he not been told that she was free?

How all the old tender love so long repressed surged up in his heart! How the passion that was no longer sin or dishonor, overleapt all barriers, and overwhelmed him with its force, till he—strong man though he was—almost trembled at the thought of the little fragile girl who might be his yet, to protect and cherish through life, unto death!

So long, so long he had dwelt in outer darkness, this flood of new light blinded and dazzled him.

His soul was sick with passionate longing to be near her. Only to see her little tender face, pale as he had seen it last. Only to touch her warm, soft hand, and to know all the while she was free: and some day, some glorious day, when he had won back some of her love, he would be able to tell her all.

Ah ! would she listen to him ?

Would she still be as hard and cold and bitter against him as she had been when last he had seen her ; or had time and sorrow softened her, and taught her to judge less quickly ?

Guy Lawrence felt that if he let his mind dwell on these things he would not be able to turn his thoughts to anything else. It seemed to him that he had no right to think so much of his own love—his own hopes and fears, when Bertie was in danger, “going to the dogs.” How those careless words, spoken so thoughtlessly, rung in Guy’s ears. He felt that if in this case it had been possible by any sacrifice of himself to have saved Bertie from what he felt would be irretrievable social and probable moral ruin, he would have made it willingly and gladly.

But it was not. It seemed that his powers of endurance were not to be so tried again. If his influence over Celia Ragoni failed, he would have to stand by, helpless, and watch the ruin which he would not be able to avert.

How could he indulge in any dreams of happiness for himself, when Bertie, his mother’s boy, was rushing blindly on a fate which would mar his whole life ?

If it had been possible to read Guy Lawrence’s thoughts in his face, as, late in the afternoon, he turned his steps towards Curzon Street, I think one might have seen written there something very like hatred for the woman towards whom he was hurrying.

The room in which he found himself a few minutes later was eminently characteristic of “*La Belle Sorcière*.”

It was brilliant and luxurious, but the brilliance was immensely overdone. The gorgeous lues of the drapery, the costliness of the furniture and ornamentation, the heavily perfumed air, the strange medley of various objects—some of them exquisitely beautiful in themselves, but utterly spoilt by their surroundings—were all redolent of the woman herself.

The easy, piled-up cushions of rich-colored velvet seemed thrown down for the Sybaritish repose of the beautiful form ;

the subdued light that fell through the tinted sun-blinds seemed modulated for the languor of the heavy-lidded eyes. A jewelled fan, a half-emptied cup of rarest china, a little handkerchief—all lace and no cambric—were lying together just as she had left them. Celia Ragoni had gained her wish. She was at least as grand—if reckless extravagance be grandeur—as “any of them,” the fine ladies whom once she envied as they rolled past her in silks and satins, reclining in soft-pillowed carriages, while she, humble and obscure, trudged along on foot.

Ay, she at least had gained her heart’s desire—poor and mean and paltry though it had been.

Guy wondered whether she was content, whether these things seemed to her as well worth the possessing as she had once thought them: or whether she too, like all the rest of the world, was haunted by the curse of satiety.

“But gratified vanity goes a long way,” thought he, with a sneer; “I suppose she’ll be satisfied as long as she’s the rage.”

It was little wonder that the new actress had created a furore. As the heavy blue velvet *portières* were pushed aside and she swept into the room, the sneer died from Guy Lawrence’s lips, and prejudiced against her though he was, he could not but confess that her beauty was a thing at which to wonder.

She was even more perfect in her fuller maturity than she had been two years ago. If she had seemed beautiful the night before in her gossamer robes or her tattered serge, she was ten times more so in her daylight attire. She wore a dress of richest-colored violet satin, trimmed with a profusion of rare old lace. The body was cut square across the neck, and the sleeves were open and hanging; delicate white lace was drawn over her snowy bosom and fell in soft folds about her rounded arms. Round her neck a band of violet satin held a brilliant diamond cross, and jewels sparkled on her arms and fingers; her hair, looking dusky in the shaded room, was brushed smoothly back from her low broad forehead, and was coiled in thick plaits round her head.

She was thoroughly well got up—she had made the most of herself in every particular; and yet she had the art of letting her magnificence seem part of herself, as if it belonged to her and was not a studied effect.

"I scarcely dared to hope you would come," she said, holding out her hand to Guy Lawrence.

"Why not?" he said, smiling. "Should I be the only one to refuse my homage to the Queen of Beauty?"

Celia threw herself back among her cushions and signed to him to seat himself by her side. Then, for the first time, Lawrence became aware of the presence of a third person, a very small person, who, coming in behind Celia, had been invisible, absolutely obscured by her magnificence.

"So that's the sheep-dog," thought Guy, bowing in token of a very slight introduction from Celia.

Propriety was engraven in every line of the widow's insipid countenance—in her cap, in the stiff folds of her bombazine dress, in her smile, in the very manner in which she folded her hands across a spotless cambric handkerchief on her lap. She was so intensely and assertively proper that she looked hypocritical, and Guy took an aversion to her on the spot.

"I thought," said Celia, looking down, "that perhaps you would feel you couldn't forgive me, and that you wouldn't care to see me; but I am—oh, so glad you have come!"

"How could I help feeling glad to see you?" said Guy, vaguely, his eyes wandering in the direction of the lady opposite, inwardly speculating as to how far Celia had taken her into her confidence, and whether she wished him to allude to things connected with her past history in the presence of another person.

Celia followed the direction of his eyes.

"Mrs. Robarts, wouldn't you like to go for a walk?—it's so fine. I need not detain you. And would you mind taking Frou-Frou? she'll be all the better for a run. *Va donc, petite,*" said she, unceremoniously shaking off the presence of her chap-erone much as she shook off the little white, curly dog which was nestling in the folds of her dress.

"Certainly, if—" said the mild lady, rising to go.

"If I can do without you? Oh yes—I need not keep you to-day," answered Celia; and Guy, as he rose to open the door for Mrs. Robarts, pitied the unfortunate woman who was compelled to submit to the haughty impertinence of this girl, who was so winningly gracious to those whom she cared to please.

Then Guy came back, and sat down on the cushions by her side, close to her, and looked into her eyes long and steadfastly without speaking, till Celia, who had grown hardened to the boldest stares, blushed as she raised her eyes to meet his.

"What is it?" she said at length, uneasily. "Are you angry with me? Can't you forgive me?"

"You, who cared nothing for my advice or my wishes, can care little for my forgiveness," he answered, coldly, forgetting in his truthfulness his desire to please her.

"But I do—I do. Ah, you can't think how I felt last night when my eyes first rested on your face! You looked so cold and cruel, you seemed to be upbraiding me. I knew that I deceived and disobeyed you, who had been so kind to me. I was tired and faint, I could bear no more, and I almost fell," pleaded Celia; and her face, softened into supplication, melted Guy's coldness as the snow-drift is melted by the rays of the sun.

"What right have I to upbraid you?" he answered, hotly. "You have gained the triumph, the admiration, and all the things you so much desired. You are satisfied; what should I want more, or what does it matter to you that I would a thousand times rather see you humble and obscure than leading the life you lead now?"

"What harm is there in the life?" answered Celia. "It suits me."

"It suits no woman to forfeit respect for admiration, modest retirement for public display; but as for talking to you of these things now, *cui bono*? It's a little too late."

"You are very hard on me," she faltered, drooping her beautiful head.

"Am I really? What then?" said Guy, impatiently, "can't you be content to let any one escape you? Must you number every one among the ranks of your slaves and admirers? Be appeased. I acknowledge your triumph. You are everything that can be desired—as an actress."

She looked up at him, her eyes glittering, and broke into a radiant smile.

"It has come true—it has come true," she said, clasping her hands together. "Don't you remember my words, 'What you call ruin—I will make my triumph?'"

"'Tis only that we call things by different names," he said, coldly.

Her face changed suddenly.

"Ah! you will never be pleased with me; you are prejudiced against me."

"You complain of that as bitterly as if you had done this thing for the mere sake of pleasing me. You forget that you did it in opposition to my wishes," answered Guy. "But surely you are satisfied; with all the world at your feet, what can it matter to you that only one man—a very insignificant and long-forgotten member of society—refuses to acknowledge that you have done wisely in becoming what you are? What does it matter to you that my eyes are so unfortunately clear that they cannot take the brightest glitter for real gold?"

"My success is real gold to me, and that is all that matters—as you say," retorted Celia, haughtily. "Where should I be now? what should I have gained by it, if to satisfy a whim of yours I had renounced my ambition? What right had you to expect that I should give up everything for you, who cared so little?"

"None at all—at least, I never did expect it," replied he, calmly.

And then there was a pause, and Guy began to remember that the conversation was drifting a way he had not intended it to go.

"But, Celia," he said at last, drawing closer to her, and

looking down at her admiringly, "all this is past. The present and the future are all that remain. Won't you reinstate me into my old character of guardian, and tell me all your confidences—make me *au fait* at all your conquests and secrets? Who is the most favored among the many who worship at your shrine?"

She returned his gaze, and the rich color deepened on her cheek.

"Why should I trouble you with my confidences? You take no interest in me or my concerns."

"Yes I do," he answered, taking her hand in his; "more, a great deal, than you can think."

Celia did not know what meaning his words bore, but he spoke them truthfully enough.

"What have I to tell you? It is only just as I foretold it would be—a great deal of admiration, very little love. You will tell me that is all I can expect, being what I am. But did any one *ever* love me?"

"It would be strange indeed if they did not," answered Guy. "You are deceiving me or yourself, Celia; you are not a woman to be seen and not loved."

He spoke half to himself, and looked at her half unconsciously, so earnestly that she dropped her eyes uneasily.

"It is hard to tell the real from the sham in love and everything else. I don't take the trouble to try. I class them all together, and value them for just as much as they're worth," she answered with a laugh, and then she turned to him. "But you stand apart from all the rest; you are different—to me. You won't quite forsake me, you won't be ashamed to come and see me sometimes?"

"I'll come—till you tire of me and my grave face," said Guy. "I'm afraid that will be very soon; it's the prerogative of beauties to be capricious."

"To every one else, but never to you—never to you," she answered, looking straight up into his face with her great eyes.

It was little wonder that Guy Lawrence, looking down into

them, felt it was easy enough to play the part he had laid out for himself; easy enough to look admiration and sweet flattery in that most beautiful face.

But though he could not be insensible to the charm of her beauty, he never for one moment forgot that it was she who was the cause of his brother's infatuation; and he never really softened to her.

He lingered on and on, talking a trifle *à tort et à travers* of anything but the subject that was uppermost in his mind, for still he had not attained the chief object of his visit; he had not even mentioned Bertie's name.

He almost resolved that until he knew her better he would not attempt to use his influence over her in this matter in any direct manner.

Her vanity, which made her so apt to take offence at anything he said, would be set on fire at the bare supposition that a love for herself was a ruinous thing—a thing to be dreaded as a degradation.

Guy Lawrence, realizing the intense pride and self-assertion of this woman's nature, began to think that it would be worse than useless to appeal to her generosity to save Bertie from a marriage with herself, or to urge upon her to do so in remembrance of the obligation she was under to him, her benefactor. He began to fear that by doing so he might only drive her to show her power more terribly and certainly than she had done before. It would be better perhaps to trust to time to strengthen the influence he possessed over her. He felt that it was already great; that from some cause, perhaps from old association, a remembrance of the time when he was to her almost a demi-god, her preserver from misery and death, Celia Ragoni attached more importance to his words, his praise, or his depreciation than to any other's.

He resolved that he would do anything and everything to gain more and more power over her, but that at present it was not safe to put it to the test.

Still he greatly wished to discover from Celia whether she

loved Bertie or not. Till he knew that, he was working in the dark. But it was difficult to mention him to her, to speak in differently on a subject on which he felt so deeply.

Accident helped him at last. Celia was speaking of his unexpected appearance at the theatre on the previous evening.

"Yes," answered Guy, seizing the opening, "it was quite a chance that took me there. I was dining with my young brother, and he—by the bye, he is one of your most devoted admirers. I suppose you knew of the relationship, though we bear different names?"

Celia hesitated a moment, and then she looked searchingly up in Guy's face.

"Yes; I knew he was your brother."

"Not much resemblance though, is there?"

"Some," answered Celia; "but you are much older, and—wiser."

Guy fancied there was a hidden sarcasm in her words.

"I wish *he* were wiser," he answered; "he gives me much anxiety."

Celia laughed.

"Your brother must be much obliged to you for troubling yourself. Do you constitute yourself his guardian angel?"

"I am his guardian, though I can't lay claim to any angelic qualities. He isn't twenty-one yet, you know."

"And I suppose you think he is going to the bad, because he frequents theatres and other wicked places?"

"I wish that were his greatest weakness," answered Guy; then he added, with slight hesitation, "he is frightfully extravagant, and he's got into a bad set—a set that's likely to lead him into trouble."

Celia threw a quick glance at him as she played with a diamond bracelet on her wrist. Guy following the movements of her restless fingers, caught himself vaguely wondering whose gift it was.

"Celia," he said impulsively, laying his hand on hers, "a beautiful woman has far more influence over a boy than a man.

I wish if ever you have an opportunity you'd try and persuade Bertie of his folly."

"He must be very different from his brother if he can be influenced by me," she replied, lifting her gleaming eyes to his face.

Guy looked at her long and steadfastly.

"You depreciate your own power. Do you remember what I said to you long ago? That beauty such as yours— Well, I must go before I lose my senses." And he rose to leave as he spoke.

Celia rose too. Her hand lingered in his, her face softened into tenderness.

"You will come to see me again?"

"I will come—when you want me. You can always find me by sending a note to my hotel, Long's, in Bond Street. Good-by." He hesitated a moment, as if he would have said something, and then he dropped her hand and left her.

She stood there a moment, looking after him, and then she turned, and throwing herself down on her cushions, sank into one of the strange crouching attitudes peculiar to her; and with her arms resting on her knees, her face supported by her hands, her eyes looking like smouldering fires in the half-light, she sat there in a sort of trance.

It was not possible for any one who did not understand the concentrated power of Celia Ragoni's nature to believe how all her thoughts and desires had been set on this one thing—that Guy Lawrence should acknowledge her triumph.

It had been her ambition to become a famous actress; but her success would have lost half its charm if it had not been possible for him to witness it.

Through all the weary drudgery, through all the dearly bought glory, she had thought of him. She herself did not know why it was so—why she cared more for his opinion than any other. Perhaps it was that her nature, vain and worldly, thus unconsciously acknowledged the superiority of his; or that he, who had first appeared to her in the character of preserver

and saviour, had become to her, who was so utterly religionless, the object of that reverence which, in some form or other, is almost necessary to humanity.

Certain it was that she, who was defiant of all others, feared him; and in her inmost heart dreaded his scorn, longed for his admiration.

Sometimes she almost hated him, because he was the only one who opposed her wishes, spoke unpleasant truths to her; and when he did yield her admiration, did it in a semi-satirical sort of way that made it worse than depreciation.

To have gained Guy Lawrence's love—to have made him foolishly, senselessly in love with her, as other men were—Celia Ragoni would have sacrificed her soul; nay, what was more to her than her soul, the luxuries, the gratified vanity, that were the very essence of her present life. To be able to toy and trifle with him, to laugh at him, to hold him in her power—not because she loved him, but because he had scorned her, thought badly of her—ah! that would be the greatest of all conquests.

Some instinct had taught her that this young brother of his was dear to him, and now she was sure of it. As her thoughts wandered to Bertie Deverell, a slow, strange smile spread over her face. Was she thinking of the power she had gained over one brother, through the other who loved her so passionately?

Was she thinking how clearly she had read Guy's thoughts, when he spoke to her about Bertie? Was she, as she sat there with a fierce gleam in her eyes, a cruel smile on her lips, crouched like a tigress ready for a spring, thinking how surely he would one day come to plead to her, to ask a favor of her—and be refused? Surely there was little hope in trusting to the merciful forbearance of a woman who could look as Celia Ragoni looked then.

And Guy Lawrence left the house utterly dissatisfied with his visit—with what he had done and left undone. He felt that he had most signally failed in all that he had intended to do.

Face to face with this woman, the words that he would have

spoken to her had died on his lips, and he felt that in trusting to her gratitude and generosity he had indeed been leaning upon a broken reed.

He could only bide his time, and wait and hope, resolving never to lose sight of her. But of one thing he felt convinced: that whatever love this woman was capable of, that love was not for Bertie. He had watched her narrowly, and in spite of all her caution, he felt tolerably certain that she had no tender feeling for the boy who by a few false smiles she had made her slave.

Poor Bertie! Guy ground his teeth and clinched his hands with passion as he thought of his foolish, frantic adoration for this vain self-worshipper; and vowed that at any risk, any cost, he should be saved from being made her victim.

CHAPTER XVII.

KITTY LORTON was alone in Grosvenor Square. The children had gone out with Mrs. Hoare and Lily Ransford—a merry carriage-full. From her place in the window the little governess watched the start, till the sound of rustling, of voices and laughter, died away. The carriage with its gay burden rolled off, the street-door closed with a bang, and she was all alone in a great empty house, with an afternoon of liberty and solitude before her.

She felt strangely lonely and desolate all by herself, poor child! it was all so silent, and the sunshine, though it might be pleasant and bright enough outside, fell with a pitiless, scorching glare on the bare dull walls of the school-room. There were no soft-tinted blinds, no fresh flowers to relieve her eyes, no luxurious pillowed couches to tempt her to repose, no seductive novels to while away the weary hours; only a dusty horsehair sofa—to think of lying on it made her head ache—a

few brown-paper-covered lesson-books, some broken toys, and an old piano. It did look dreary; it did seem hard that all the happiness and the brightness and the fun should belong to some lives, and all the dulness and weariness and heart-aching to others. It seemed to her so strange that such different measures of happiness should be meted out to her and to them. Was it according to merit or to blind chance? Was it her own fault, or only her fate that, ere she had well begun her life, all the light and the sunshine should have been blotted out of it? She seemed too young and too pretty to be sentenced to solitude and dulness, and sometimes she chafed piteously against the stern decree which seemed to have been passed against her, condemning her in her youth and her loveliness to be one of those solitary ones who have no place, no vocation in the world; who seem to have altogether missed their proper place, and to be neither useful nor happy. Her life was not a busy one, and she had no hopes, no cares for others, to fill up her spare thoughts and moments. No occupations or beguilements either. She could not venture out alone. There was not one in all the great busy, pleasure-seeking city, into which she had come a little forlorn stranger, to call her friend; and how could she wander amid the bewildering labyrinth of streets, or in the crowded parks, solitary and objectless? Nothing to do either. What was the use of being active and energetic, of striving and hoping, when there was no object which seemed to her worth the attaining? Better to fall into apathy and quiescence, to live out her life, not try to alter it. She would soon get accustomed to the dulness and monotony, she would soon get so used to the shade that her eyes would shrink from the sunshine. She was beginning to feel something of this already, to dread any attempt to drag her into the outer world. A morbid self-consciousness had grown upon her with long solitude, which was in reality foreign to her nature.

She had always been more of a dreamer than a materialist, and in these days she lived half her time in a land of dreams, which was very different from the commonplace world around

her—a land in which a bright being, a glorified likeness of herself, was always living a life so different from hers, so full of love and adventure and goodness; but, alas!

“One of these lives is a fancy,
But the other one is true.”

But to-day some chance word had dispelled these visions, and they had fled like so many pale ghosts. Her thoughts were wandering back to past scenes, past days. The mention of a name had brought them all to her mind—a name that seemed only like the echo of one that had been familiar to her long ago—Guy Lawrence. The same and yet not the same; not the man whom she had loved and looked up to as something grand and noble, and far above herself—that was the ideal; this one, of whose return and presence at his cousin's reception she had heard mention a day or two ago, was the real Guy Lawrence.

Kitty thought that it was only the remembrance of what he had once been to her that made her still attach so much interest to his name, that the mere mention of it had power to make her cheeks flush, her heart throb. She thought that she scorned him, despised him, and had no remnant of feeling left for him, either way; that she could meet him calmly as the veriest stranger; but the bare idea that he was in town, and that she might some day accidentally encounter him face to face, had made her restless and nervous, and more than ever inclined to hide herself. She felt now that she could not bear to meet him—to have to endure his pity, his condolence. She was no longer one of the world of which he formed a part.

He would probably scarcely recollect her, and she would rather be forgotten by him who was so painfully connected with the remembrance of her past life.

So buried in her reverie was Kitty Lorton as she sat there with her arms resting on the table, her chair tilted forward, and her fingers buried in her disordered hair, that she only became conscious of a knock at the door when it was repeated.

"Bother!" she muttered, pushing back her hair and arranging her tumbled collar. "Come in;" and looking up, she saw Guy standing there, hat in hand.

She rose up and stood by the table without taking his outstretched hand, feeling that she hated herself for the hot flush that was mantling her face.

"Mrs. Hoare is not here—she's gone out."

"I did not expect to find her here, but the servant told me you were in this room. I am quite at home here, you know. I always find my way up here when I come to Grosvenor Square. I prefer to enjoy the society of my small cousins *au naturel*—not when they are in their company frocks and company manners."

"They are both out now with their mamma," replied Kitty, frigidly.

"And you—won't you pardon me for coming here to seek you? I suppose I ought to apologize for intruding in this room, now it is your retreat as well as the children's?"

Whatever awkwardness and constraint Guy Lawrence might feel, he did not show it in his manner—that was cool and quiet enough; but Kitty stood twisting her fingers in and out, getting red and white by turns, horribly conscious of her own nervousness and of her shabby black frock and untidy hair. She had felt so safe in this room, where visitors never intruded, she had not even taken the trouble to dress herself becomingly. She felt profoundly ashamed that Guy Lawrence should see her like this. He, who was so critical and fastidious, was probably making inward comments upon her attire, and contrasting her appearance with what it had been. She knew she was altered—terribly altered; her glass told her that, when it reflected a little face from which the bright, fresh color, the *verve*, the sparkling brilliancy, had utterly fled; but still there were gradations of beauty and ugliness, and at this moment she felt that she was looking her very worst. She did not know that Guy was gazing down at her with such a tumult of passionate feeling in his heart that he could scarcely speak to her and

keep it under restraint; she did not know that he was absolutely unconscious of the shabby frock, the fuzzy hair, the rumpled collar—that he saw only a little pale face, with sad eyes, and tender, sensitive mouth, and felt that, saddened and changed though it was, it was more lovely to him in its sweet sorrowfulness than ever it had been in its gayety.

She did not know how, through all the sleepless hours of the previous night, he had thought and thought of her, till the longing to see her had been too great to resist. She did not know how he had watched and waited till he knew she was alone; she did not know all that was in his heart to say to her now, all the wild words of love and tenderness that were trembling on his lips.

Kitty did not answer his last words, but she stood there as if waiting for him to go.

"Won't you give me a warmer welcome after my long absence?" said Guy, gently. "I have not seen you for more than a year."

She flushed crimson as she remembered how she had last parted from him.

"I thought I should see you the other night. I came here to Clara's reception. Why weren't you downstairs?"

"I?" answered Kitty. "You forget that I am only the governess. I don't go down when there is company, and I don't receive visitors up here."

"Do you mean to say that Clara—"

"I mean nothing of the sort. Your cousin is everything that is kind; but I am out of place at such parties, and you—you are out of place here," answered Kitty, angrily.

"Miss Lorton, how can you possibly—"

"I know I seem very rude, but, Mr. Lawrence, you place me in a false position by coming here, by remembering in any way our former intimacy. As long as your mother was alive, and—and things were different—" Kitty hesitated, paused in inextricable confusion.

"If my mother had been alive," muttered Guy, "all this

would never have been. She would never have allowed you to become a governess. But it is not possible that you can do me so much injustice as to suppose that because—no, it is too absurd to put into words—too bad even for you to believe it of me. Kitty, you do not know how much I have longed to see you—to speak to you.”

“You?” exclaimed Kitty, turning round on him, her face blazing; “you forget that I know more of the world than I did two years ago. I am not quite so credulous, so easily made to believe in people’s fine speeches, as I was once.”

Guy looked back at her with a troubled face.

“You might have believed all I have ever said to you. I never spoke an untruth to you in my life,” he said, quietly.

“Never spoke—” she began, with a sneer; but then her face changed suddenly. She remembered the want of dignity there would be in any reproaches, any references to former scenes. “But all that is past,” she added, quietly, “past and gone, and things are changed. Mr. Lawrence, thank you for coming to see me; you meant to be kind, but indeed you do not know how your visit may do me harm. Mrs. Hoare does not know, will not understand, perhaps. I must go.” And Kitty moved towards the door, but Guy sprang forward and caught her hand.

“Stay, Kitty. I would have spoken to you less abruptly. There were many things I wished to say to you, but you will not have patience, you will not hear me; only this you *shall* hear—”

He paused, and in his eagerness clutched her hand so hard that she looked up at him with a half-scared expression on her little childish face, and then he spoke.

“Kitty, I came here to-day to ask you to be my wife.”

She turned deadly white. Slowly the surprise and bewilderment faded, and in their place there came a passion that was almost fury.

“You came here,” she gasped out between her half-closed lips, “to insult me again—a second time. Not content with

making me your dupe, your plaything, when I was a mere child and knew no better, had no knowledge of the honor of gentlemen, you think to deceive me again, now that I am only a governess."

She paused breathless, and Guy, letting her hand drop, folded his arms, and looked long at her, very sorrowfully.

"I half expected this," he said, gravely. "You have a right to speak like this to me, perhaps—that is why I did not attempt to say one word of love to you. I only asked you to be my wife. There could be no mistake about that. I thought you *could* not construe that into an insult."

Woman-like, she only caught at one word he had uttered.

"Love!" she echoed; "*you* would scarcely dare to speak of love to me!"

"Kitty," he said, very gravely, "you are so passionate, so hasty—you don't ever pause to think. What can be my motive in asking you to marry me, except it is that I love you?" he dwelt tenderly on the word, and then he added, "ay, so dearly, so truly, so unceasingly."

She did try to think. She passed her hand over her forehead as if to clear away the confusion of her thoughts.

"Motive?" she said. "You know best. I cannot tell, except it is that you want to see me again supplicating for your mercy, confessing my senseless love, imploring yours—"

A spasm of pain passed over his face.

"Have some pity, if you can," he exclaimed. "You believe you have a right to reproach me, but spare me the remembrance of the bitterest torture I ever endured. Kitty, that day in the library at Erlesmere, I would have given my life—ay more, my soul—to have been able to speak one word to you, to have been able to tell you that I loved you."

She had grown pale and still, and she stood gazing at him with dilated eyes as he spoke on.

"You stood there before me, and with your simple words, your looks, confessed that you loved me. Can you think what an infinite torment it was for me, who loved you so dearly, so

unutterably, to hold my peace, to keep myself quiet and still, to prevent myself from snatching you to my heart?" His voice broke; then he went on more quietly. "And yet I was bound in honor to keep silence. I was fettered by a vow which sealed my lips—no, listen to me, you must hear me," he continued, arresting her as she would have spoken. "You have done me injustice too long, and I have borne it because I thought myself obliged, but now that I am free to speak, I will."

The earnestness of his manner awed Kitty, and she stood silently, with one hand resting on the table, as if to support herself, still pale and trembling, with a passionate light in her eyes.

"You doubt that I loved you; you will not believe me when I tell you so. Oh, child! how can I find words to express all that you were to me in those days? Even if I could, you would not understand. It was the dearest hope of my life that I might win your love, win you for my wife; and one day when we rode together—you remember that day under the trees—I could not quite suppress my passion, and I fancied that you must have understood, have known something of what I felt."

"You attach too much importance to an idle flirtation," Kitty interrupted, with a bitter laugh; "it's fair sport to amuse yourself with that sort of pastime when you are in the country—is it not? I was only a child then, and it was my fault, no doubt, that I misunderstood you."

"But for the accident to St. Dunstan, I should have told you everything then and there," continued Guy, scarcely heeding her words, "and there would have been no misunderstanding. Kitty, you have done me a cruel wrong. You have thought hard things of me, and I have not been able to justify myself. I thought I should never be free to tell you the reason why I could not ask you to be my wife, though I loved you better than anything in the world—the reason why I could not tell you the truth, though I would have given my life to do

so, when you came to me afterwards: but I may now. Oh, Kitty, listen to me; my darling, hear me. The day after my mother's funeral, I learnt that Bertie loved you, that all his hopes were centred on you, and for his sake, because I had vowed to secure his happiness at the cost of my own, I gave you up to him, and I tried to overcome my love, to persuade myself that you did not love me. Have you no feeling for me—can't you imagine what I suffered?"

"I can imagine what an easy sacrifice it was. I can imagine that having gone almost too far in a flirtation with a little country girl, you were very glad to find your brother was willing to marry her."

"Kitty," said Guy, sternly, "you should not say these things. What have I done, that you will not believe me when I tell you the truth?—I, who have never told a falsehood in my life."

"What have you done?" she repeated, overcome by her passion. "Let me tell you once for all—even if I die of shame afterwards for having said it. You led me on, little by little, into loving you. You made me forget to hide my love, because I was so sure it was returned, and then—you came to my father and proposed I should marry your brother. I could not believe it—I thought there was some mistake. I rushed to you; and you—you know the rest: how you made me lower myself in my own eyes—how I left you, humiliated—disgraced." Her voice broke into a sob, and she hid her face in her hands.

Guy caught them away, and tried to draw her to him.

"My darling, my darling! you know now why it was. You would believe me if you knew how my heart has been aching for you all this weary time."

For a moment she rested in his arms, as if the dream, unreal though it was, was too sweet to break. Then she drew herself away.

"You would have me believe in such a love as this—a love which has no pity, no mercy; you who robbed my life of all

its happiness, and made me what I am—a sad, sorrowful woman—not a happy, innocent child—will tell me that you love me!”

“It may be that I was wrong—I sometimes think I was; I should have considered you before all. But oh, Kitty, forgive me! Let me by my love and care atone to you for all that is past; let me make your life happy, and shield you from every sorrow. Oh, my darling, come to me!”

He held out his arms, and the tears stood in his eyes. She looked in his face for a moment, and then she broke out into bitter sobbing.

“I can’t, I can’t; you don’t love me.”

Guy came closer to her, and took her hand in his, and tried to raise her little tear-stained face; and when he spoke, his voice was very husky and broken.

“I do love you, Kitty; I do love you.”

She looked up into his eyes, as if she would read his very soul.

“No,” she said, very slowly, and shrinking farther away from him. “I have been deceived once; I will never trust again—the waking is too bitter.”

“What can make you so hard and cold? Tell me, only tell me,” pleaded Guy. “What can I say, what can I do, to prove how much I love you?”

“If I am cold and hard, it was your work. The childish trustfulness of those days that are gone will never come back to me; you destroyed it.”

“For pity’s sake spare me these reproaches. I may have deserved them, but I cannot bear them from you,” exclaimed Guy. “Oh, Kitty, dear, be more like yourself. Only speak to me once in the old way. Tell me that you will try to love me again, and give me the right to protect you. My poor little girl, you are too young and tender to face the world all by yourself.”

“You would marry me out of pity, then?” she asked, still speaking in the same hard, bitter tone. “I have heard that

you are charitable, but that is carrying your benevolence rather too far; and I, who would not let Bertie stoop to marry me from love, will scarcely let you marry me from pity."

"Kitty, this is all high-flown nonsense: even if the greatest social barriers existed between us, love has power to sweep them all down; but they do not. You, and you alone, are able to make me intensely happy, or unutterably miserable. Speak only one word, darling, and tell me that you will love me again."

He took her hand in his, and looked down at her with his face softened into inexpressible tenderness; and she looked back at him with a terrible yearning in her heart, which, for a moment, showed itself in her eyes; but then she drew herself away.

"Love you!" she answered: "you taught me the folly of that long ago."

Guy was silent for a moment, and then he spoke very earnestly.

"Tell me the truth, and I will believe you. If it is only some question of foolish pride, or some remembrance of fancied insult or injury, that you would raise up between us to separate us; if all the while you love me still, I will throw down all your objections, and win you in spite of yourself; but if—oh, Kitty, for God's sake don't deceive me!—if all the love you once had for me is gone, dead, and it is beyond your power to revive it, then I will leave you; I won't vex you any more with my entreaties, I will go away from you, and never speak to you of my love again."

Guy's voice gave way suddenly, and he paused for a moment.

"You cannot tell how hard it is to feel that the hope which has been so suddenly revived is to be crushed out again," he continued, passionately. "Nothing but the assurance that you do not love me, will make me leave you now. Oh, Kitty, speak quickly! tell me, don't you love me just a little still?"

And the girl stood before him, her small hands tightly interlaced as if by the pressure she could still her trembling limbs,

her breath coming in short gasps, her face drawn and strained, her lips parched and quivering, a terrible struggle going on in her heart—the conflict between her pride and her love. Her love, which made her long to throw herself in his arms, and rest there forever content. Her pride, which made her remember how once this man had rejected her, how it was now in her power to revenge the insult. Ah! which would conquer?

In that short time of bitter agony to them both, the fate of their lives hung on her trembling lips, and still she could not speak.

As through the mind of a drowning man there flashes, in the instant preceding death, a vivid retrospection of his whole life, so, in that moment of terrible indecision, there flashed through her mind the remembrance of all the past.

The remembrance of a summer morning's ride, of a dream of love half-realized, of a terrible awakening, and a cruel blow, dealt by the hand of the man she had loved—and in spite of all the bitter anger and fierce resentment she had so long nourished against him, she knew that through all there had been in her heart a strong under-current of love, which time had not been able to conquer, which surged up now, and with its pent-up force threatened to beat down all the barriers her pride had raised up against it.

Looking up into his face, aged and saddened, noting the streaks of silver in his hair, she dimly realized that he, too, had had his share of suffering, and with the instinct so strong in every woman to administer comfort, she longed, with a terrible longing, for the infinite happiness which might be hers, if only she could forget the past.

So fierce was the hurricane of conflicting feeling warring within her breast that she felt bewildered; she could not realize her actual position, she could not credit the fact that it had come to this; that he, Guy Lawrence, stood before her, waiting for her answer to the one question on which he had built all his hopes—stood before her, asking her to be his

wife; and she, who had in her shame and fury longed to humiliate him as he had humiliated her, hesitated to answer, hesitated to speak and cast away the love which not long ago she had told herself in her anger, would be, after all that had passed, the worst insult he could offer her.

And so Guy waited in vain for his answer.

At last he spoke.

"Won't you tell me, Kitty? Will you love me? Do you love me? Only yes or no?"

Some sudden thought, some bitter remembrance, fired her, and she spoke at last; though the word lingered on her trembling lips, as if it would condemn its own falseness.

"No!" she said, looking at him with a desperate courage.

"Is that true? You could not tell me a lie. Is the old love hopelessly dead? can you never love me again? Tell the truth, Kitty, as you would before God, for both our lives hang on your word."

Her face blanched, but still she clasped her hands together with the same effort after self-command.

"It is true. I do not love you—never can love you again," she answered, her words coming very slowly and solemnly, as if they were tolling her own death-knell.

He fixed on her a long, steady look of unflinching scrutiny, and then he withdrew his eyes and turned away to the window without a word of answer.

He looked out into the glaring sunshine with strained, aching eyes and a haggard face. He had received his doom. He was a man; should he cry out, though the sentence was death? Should he, who had so long learnt to suffer, break down because this last blow was unexpected and worse than any former one? Her love was beyond her control; should he seem to blame her because she had taken it from him, thinking him unworthy of so priceless a gift?

Only a few minutes he stayed, with his face turned from her, waiting for complete outward tranquillity, and when he turned round there was a look on his face of such wonderful,

patient, silent endurance as one sees seldom on the face of a man born to fritter away his troubles in words, but sometimes in a dumb animal of the higher species.

It awed Kitty. She felt how small her petty passions, petty pride, fancied wrongs, seemed by the side of such a great agony as had dimly traced itself on the man's face.

Almost, she would have spoken, and withdrawn the lie which her own lips had uttered but a minute ago; but the very hopelessness of the calm, the very depth of the despair which seemed to have fallen on Guy Lawrence, made it impossible for her to break through it, and seemed to forbid her to confess her falsehood.

He held out his hand.

"Good-by; do not vex yourself for me. You could not help telling the truth—you were always true. Only, before I go, may I ask you if there is anything you will let me do for you, as a friend?" He paused for a moment, cleared his voice, and then went on. "I am so much older than you. I was foolish to build any hopes on what was, after all, only a childish fancy. Forget all that; I can't help feeling grieved—my mother would be if she were alive—to think you wanted for anything. Won't you tell me if I can ever give you any help—for her sake?"

Kitty felt as if she were choking.

"There is nothing—nothing you can do. I am very happy," she stammered. And then she felt that he dropped her hand, and with one long sorrowful look of farewell, like the lingering gaze that one casts on the features of the dearly loved dead, he left her.

The door closed, and she rushed to it, and fell on her knees, and pressed her face against it, and listened to every footstep that bore him away. And then the hall-door slammed, and she knew he was gone—gone out of her life forever; and with a low cry she threw herself prone on the ground and hid her face in her outstretched arms.

Surely, surely, she moaned to herself, no sorrow could equal

her sorrow ; no despair equal her despair. She loved him with all her heart and soul and strength ; and she had sent him from her—cast away his love with her own foolish hands. There lay the bitterness of the sting. She had done it herself ; she could no longer murmur at fate, or complain that her lot in life was harder than that of others, for happiness, great, inconceivable, undreamt-of, had lain within her grasp, and she had thrust it from her.

She had stained her lips with a lie, the remembrance of which would haunt her through all time with a terrible remorse. And he had called her true, had accepted her sentence as inevitable, because it had not been possible for him to doubt her truth. Then, and not till then, had she felt how utterly false she was, how utterly unworthy of Guy Lawrence's love.

As she lay on the ground, in the utter abandonment of her terrible sorrow, hiding her face from the bright, pitiless sun, there came to her a dim prevision of her own future. She seemed to behold all the great waste of life stretching out before her : a wilderness of weary years, in which their two paths, his and hers, which should have lain together, would be forever separated, in which she would have to walk alone, unsupported, unsolaced—alone to the end. And she half realized then, that though after the lapse of years, this present sorrow would be as a thing that is past, it would yet cast its shadow over her life—that never again could she love, and suffer, and repent as now.

In the loneliness, the terrible dulness of her young life, she had prayed for any change to break the long monotony, the daily unending weariness ; and it had come—the chance of a great, wonderful happiness—and in the madness of her pride and folly she had cast it away.

In the reaction of feeling all her pride had gone from her, and if it had been possible for Guy Lawrence ever to believe her, she would have been almost ready to confess that in saying she did not love him, she had told a lie—she would have been almost ready to humiliate herself a second time in his eyes. But he was gone from her forever. So she told herself ; but even as

the thought passed through her brain, she cherished some vague, secret hope that it was possible for this terrible darkness to brighten, that she might see him once again, and seeing him, show him by some word or look that her heart was not quite hardened against him, that there yet remained in it some tenderness for him.

Utterly worn out with sorrow, she raised her pitiful little tear-blistered face from its hiding-place, and gathered herself up preparatory to seeking the shelter of her own room.

Tears are luxuries in which only the rich and those who have no irksome duties to perform, can indulge. She could not hide her face in solitude, and her swollen eyes and sorrow-stained cheeks would cause remarks which she did not care to encounter.

"So I must not even cry," she said to herself, with a great sob in her throat, for it seemed to her just then, poor child! as if the burden of her self-caused trouble was almost greater than she could bear.

And a man walked along the sun-scorched streets with rapid footsteps, heedless where he went, with a bitter agony in his heart which rendered him insensible to the burning heat—the agony of a great despair, an irreparable loss: the loss of a love which had once been his, which now he knew would never, never, through all time be his again.

CHAPTER XVIII.



ON that night Estelle gave a supper-party. They were much sought after, these little suppers of Estelle's—dainty, *recherché* feasts, where the guests were well chosen and the cuisine irreproachable.

Estelle, with the tact of a clever hostess, with the *savoir vivre* of a woman of the world, was careful that these small feasts

should be free from the constraint of a formal entertainment; that they should savor rather of the bonhomie of Bohemianism than of the conventional dullness some seem to think inseparable from propriety.

But while relying much upon the social attractiveness of her suppers, she never ignored the sympathy between the mind and body; and knowing that the nearest way to men's hearts was through their palates—at least for the hour—insured the culinary success of her feasts by securing the much-sought-after services of a noted *chef*, who drove to the house in his brougham, and removed his hundred-guinea diamond ring to truss an ortolan.

Most of the guests were assembled in the drawing-room. Lounging on a sofa was a handsome brunette, superbly dressed and brilliantly bejewelled—Adèle Trébillon, a star of the Variétés—which star, unlike most of the Continental luminaries, had not yet fallen—now in London on a professional visit. By her side, languidly stroking his heavy mustache, Lord Albert Slingsby, of the 1st Life—a handsome, sleepy, Titanic, fair-haired sabreur. Beside these, Percy Danvers, of the F. O.; Nina Belton, a rising young actress, as handsome as Venus and as proper as Diana; Tom Grantly, one of the most successful dramatic authors of the day, who was realizing ten thousand a year by his sensations; and Bertie Deverell.

Estelle was reclining on a dormeuse in an attitude of graceful repose, giving little heed to the court that was being paid her.

The last theatrical scandal was discussed, the last *mot* of the coulisses related, but on this evening, contrary to her usual manner, she appeared *distracte*, while every now and then she cast expectant glances towards the door.

The full light of a chandelier fell upon her where she lay, making the snowy whiteness of her skin, the exquisite tints of cheeks and lips, the brilliant eyes, absolutely dazzling.

The strongest glare could only show up her brilliance, but could not bring out a flaw or a blemish in the marvellous coloring

that was nature's own handiwork. No art could have lent her one charm which she did not possess already; no semi-light was needed for the enhancing of that beauty which was perfect in the fresh bloom of youthful maturity. But all that talent—or rather, a French modiste—could do for her, had been done. On this night she had abandoned her usual preference for gorgeous colors and costly heavy materials, and her trailing draperies of purest white fell in cloud-like masses around her as she lay back on her couch with that grace which gave her the air of an empress. Opals and diamonds were shining among the laces on her bosom, and a tropical flower with crimson petals gleamed in her hair.

There came a sudden light into her restless eyes, the door opened, and a servant announced “Mr. Lawrence.”

As Guy approached, a flush of pleasure overspread her face, and as he took her hand, in a low tone of reproach she said—

“I feared you weren't coming. Why are you so late?”

“I was delayed on my way here,” replied Guy, gazing with admiration at her wondrous beauty; “but I'm only five minutes over time.”

“Only five minutes!” laughed Celia; “five ages of torture to Monsieur Soufflet.”

“What a despot is a *chef*! Shall I go to the kitchen and apologize?”

“I'm not sure it would be safe. Will you take me in to supper?”

Guy offered her his arm, and at this moment caught sight of Bertie, who was looking at him with ill-concealed surprise and annoyance. Guy nodded recognition, and turned to his companion.

The *portières* were drawn aside, and they entered the adjoining room. On the table were epergnes containing the rarest cut-flowers, dishes decked with the choicest fruits, camelias that had required the most delicate culture, luscious grapes that had won their prizes, gigantic pears, a single one of which had cost as much as the monthly wage of a rural laborer; the whole

brilliantly lighted with white wax candles in artistic candelabra, while the air was laden with the aroma of pastilles.

Then was served one of those epicurean feasts which had rendered Monsieur Soufflet famous. Meats that lost their identity in the elaboration of their flavorings, cunning dishes so ingeniously introduced as to give fresh zest to appetites already satiated. Rhenish of the rarest bouquet, and Comet clarets—tributes from the cellar of a youthful duke, who little prized the mine of wealth his ancestors had laid beneath their halls.

The conversation soon became general and animated. Smart sallies, ready repartees, short and pointed anecdotes, through the hum of which such utterances were heard as "Chablis," "Sauterne," "salmi of woodcocks."

At first both Guy and Bertie said little. Guy, unable to throw off the heart-sickness that his interview with Kitty had caused him, was striving to drown his recollection of it by constant draughts of champagne; while Bertie, though trying to appear indifferent, was impatient at the marked neglect Estelle had shown him, and was beginning jealously to fancy that any preference she did accord was to Guy. It hurt his *amour propre* to think that, spite of all his homage, spite of all the claim he felt he had upon her love, he was so easily distanced by his brother, a comparative stranger to her, as he thought.

"Are these to-night's spoils, mademoiselle?" asked Danvers, taking a camelia from a flower-glass and placing it in his button-hole. "Every conservatory in England is pillaged for your bouquets; you'll turn our country into a wilderness."

"An actress's reign is too short for that," laughed Estelle, but in a tone tinged with sadness, as she carelessly plucked a delicate rose to pieces; "the rage of an hour, at most the *mode* of a season."

"If you do lay our gardens waste, what then?" said Bertie, with a momentary touch of eloquence. "While a laurel grows, what worthier tribute to such as you?—the proudest diadem of your native country, one fit to crown imperial Cæsar."

"I prefer the flowers—they are prettier."

"But not so lasting."

"Still I prefer the flowers." She paused a moment, and then continued, haughtily, "The homage of my audience is to the actress, not the woman. I would have it so. I love the plaudits of the world; they are life and soul and sustenance to me. I live upon them; they are as vital to me as the air I breathe. Why do my admirers individualize themselves? Why do they pester me with senseless baubles, jewelled souvenirs, and perfumed billets, as sickening as the scent they reek of?"

She spoke scornfully, her eyes flashed with a look of hauteur, and with an impatient gesture she thrust away a peach that she had scarcely tasted.

"How inscrutable is a woman!" said Guy, with a contemptuous laugh, but with a dash of bitterness in his tone; "she despises the adoration she inspires: she fears the passion she creates. Surely they were wrong in making Frankenstein a man."

"Inscrutable? and yet you affect to read us so easily! Inconsistent, perhaps: cold and passionate, selfish and self-denying, tender and heartless, kind and cruel, a mixture of the serpent and the dove, gentle as a faithful hound to those we love, fierce and relentless as a hawk to its quarry where we hate."

"A list of contradictions," remarked Grantly, filling his glass with Roussillon; "do they not prove the inscrutability?"

"I thought *you* knew us better; it is your trade." Then languidly stretching her hand to a dish of superbly bloomed grapes—"When will men who long to win our love, learn not to woo us? The prize beyond our reach is ever the most coveted: it has been so since Paradise—it will be so to all eternity." Her voice sunk lower as she finished speaking, and a wistful look was in her eyes, as if the words she had spoken were no affected cynicism—were but the echo of her heart.

"Don't let's talk of love," cried Adèle Trébillon, impatiently; "it's the wettest blanket, the most exigeant autocrat I

know : a charming companion, but an intolerable master. It's like absinthe—a delicious stimulant, but very dangerous. Once let it get *la grippe* upon you—*eh bien !* the rest I know nothing about, but I've heard it's terrible."

"Can't think what the deuce people fall in love for," drawled Slingsby ; "it's a sort of moral bird-lime that anxious matrons spread for well-fledged pigeons ; a thing that old birds fight shy of."

"What a lady-killer you must be, my gallant plunger," cried Danvers, with a laugh, as he quaffed a bumper of Moselle. "When Venus finds Mars invulnerable, what an awful cut for Venus !"

And while the laughter and badinage were going on around him, Bertie was getting more and more ill at ease.

Jealous and wayward by nature, it irritated him beyond endurance to see Estelle bestow her attentions upon another. Hitherto he had rejoiced in her invariable coldness. To him only had she been kind, and her kindness had stood out in all the stronger relief, because to all others she had been so capricious and scornful. Was the love that he almost persuaded himself she bore him, after all nothing but a passing *tendresse*, an *amourette* of an hour, to be abandoned when it lost the piquancy of freshness ? Irritation, wounded pride, angered jealousy—all were merged in the intensity of his despair, when the fear came upon him that she, whom he loved with all his soul, with all the fierceness of his impetuous nature, set so little value on his love that she could wilfully sacrifice it to the gratification of a passing whim, the transient excitement of a new caprice ; for what else could prompt her to look and speak to Guy with eyes and lips that too truly simulated a love which she could not feel for him, a stranger, and one so unlikely to attract her fancy ? Every look, every word, tortured him almost beyond endurance ; he felt that he could not sit there and not cry out in the agony of his heart.

And truly his jealousy was not without cause. When Guy left Kitty Lorton, he felt reckless of all that might befall him.

Life was only a burden to be borne, with but one object, the performance of one duty. He was weary, sick at heart, and cynical; yearning in the agony of this last great trial, for oblivion of the past, for rest in the future; but there was no rest for him as long as Bertie's happiness was in jeopardy.

Guy felt just then that could he have given his life to secure his brother's safety, he would have yielded it up without a regret—ay, with a feeling of relief. But this could not be; through all the poignancy of his new-born grief he must be true to his trust. Though his cross by its weight maimed and crushed his spirit till life became a curse, yet he must bear it, even unto the end.

He had come to this party, though he had felt a terrible longing to hide himself away with his misery, to bear it alone and unseen, because it seemed to him that he was not justified in losing any opportunity of watching and waiting for any opening which would enable him to come to his brother's rescue and save him from the fate which above all things he dreaded should befall him. He had come with no definite idea of the means he should use, but slowly and imperceptibly a new thought entered into his head.

He, though he was singularly void of self-conceit, could not but see how different Celia's manner was to him and to others. There was a softness in her eyes, a lurking tenderness in her voice, as she looked and spoke to him, that came into them at no other time.

Sharp-sighted though he was, he had not seen this before, but now it dawned upon him; then broke upon him, with sudden, startling light, that it was something more than coquetry—something more than the mere regard that sprang from gratitude, that made her as she was.

Though he had pitied the outcast child, and felt an interest in the beautiful, clever, capricious actress, until now no other feeling for Celia had taken possession of him. No spark of reverence, scarcely of respect, had he ever felt for her. He had looked upon her as a woman, reckless, dangerous, unscrupulous.

pulously ambitious—as a splendid tigress, which fills us with admiration as we behold its beauty, with terror as we gaze upon its talons. But now, for the first time, he thought of her as a woman capable of loving.

If she loved—and by one of those strange, unaccountable paradoxes peculiar to womankind, loved him—here was a power suddenly and startlingly revealed to him by which he could save his brother—a cruel, unmanly power to use against a woman; but he was not a man to do things by halves. He had resolved he would prevent this marriage at all hazards, and that he was justified in using any means to gain his end—the one object of his life, sanctified by the vow he had made to his dying mother.

All this passed through Guy Lawrence's mind with strange rapidity. It was one of those crises which come to us in life; one of those sudden ideas which are almost like revelations—they take so strong a hold of our minds, that we cannot refuse to entertain them.

He recoiled from the thought of fighting a woman, and with such a weapon—her love for himself; but was it not fair that the love which she had made an instrument of torture to destroy his young brother's happiness should be turned against herself; that she should be fought with her own weapons, and should be made to suffer as she had made him suffer?

He almost resolved, as he sat there a few minutes in silence, heedless of the questioning glances that Celia from time to time threw upon him, that her love, if it really existed, should be his power over her; that he would use it remorselessly to convict her in Bertie's eyes.

What woman ever failed to show by some sure signs and tokens a love which she desired should be reciprocated?

Bertie's jealous eyes would not fail to note them, and he would learn, surely and unmistakably, that this actress had been making him a tool and a plaything, and that whatever love she was really capable of, was for another.

Guy set his teeth, in a stern resolve to smother all his scru-

ples, and if it were possible, if he were not arguing on false premises, to lead her on to commit herself, to show herself in her true colors, in the eyes of the boy who loved her so unwisely, and so far too well.

"When's the new play coming out, Grantly?" asked Danvers, as he devoured an olive.

"August, I think."

"Bad time for that sort of thing, isn't it? No one left in town, you know."

"No one at all to speak of—that is, about three million people."

"Save your smartness for your plays, *mon cher*. I mean no one in society."

"*Tant mieux*. You swells are so phlegmatic: the pit laughs at my mots, the gallery applauds my points, but the stalls, stately in their cynicisms, sneer at my sentiment, and sleep through my situations."

"That's true," laughed Nina Belton, glancing at herself in a mirror. "Why *are* the stalls so cynical and sleepy—I've often wondered?"

"Simply affectation, and—dinner. Woe to the man who writes a clever play, than which there never was a surer opiate. Amuse your audience—don't instruct them. Suit their humor—don't appeal to their brains."

"If twaddle means success, why this dearth of dramatic authors?" asked Guy.

"Because all twaddle will not succeed; it must suit the folly of the day. The public are as fickle as a woman. You shall judge. Three or four years ago, two plays of mine were brought out simultaneously and acted with equal ability. The first was the result of anxious thought and careful study; the last was the careless jottings of imperfect characters and incongruous incidents. The first, which had cost me months of labour, was played exactly thirteen nights; the last, in all honesty the greatest rubbish I ever perpetrated, had a run of more than a year, and made a manager's fortune."

"But there must have been something in it," drawled Slingsby.

"Oh yes, there was; the something being an incident in the third act. I'll describe it. The scene is a factory, with real machinery—my heroine is a working girl—her dress becomes entangled in the wheels—alarm of operatives—appropriate music—a scream for help! My hero, a factory hand, and the girl's lover, rushes forward and drags her fainting from her danger, but in his turn is caught by the revolving shaft—amid shrieks of terror he is carried writhing round the whole machine—tremendous sensation! another turn of the wheel, and he is dropped at the feet of the scarcely conscious damsel, unhurt—storms of applause—and the curtain falls."

"Oh, yes; we all remember that," laughed Danvers. "You mean 'Peers and Peasants, or Rustics and Roués.'"

"Old Levison, the manager, wanted to make the fellow have his arm torn off—in fact, he tried it—false affair, you know, with imitation blood—but the blood was rather too much; the people liked it, but it made them ill."

They had returned to the drawing-room after supper. Adèle Trébillon, having seated herself at the pianoforte, was singing one of the charming *chansonnettes* which had made her fame, with all the taste of a finished musician and all the *élan* of an experienced actress.

Celia was reclining on a lounge, playing with a small Maltese dog, but bestowing more attention upon a group in the balcony, composed of Danvers and Guy, who were smoking cigars—for it was the distinctive attraction of her parties that smoking and cards were permitted—and Nina Belton.

Bertie, though affecting to be talking to Adèle Trébillon, had been watching Celia attentively for some time. He felt chagrined beyond measure at her indifferent manner towards him. Humiliating as it was, he could not conceal the fact from himself, that all his solicitude on her behalf, all his real regard for her, had made so little impression that a comparative stranger had absorbed her attention all the evening.

"Why waste your caresses on a dog?" he said, approaching her and throwing himself into a chair by her side. "You bestow your favors where they are not appreciated."

She raised her eyes for a moment, as if to read the full meaning of his words.

"That's the fate of us all, it seems to me," she answered, in a tone of indifference.

Bertie bit his lip with vexation. "You spoke truth, Celia, when you said to woo a woman was a sure way not to win her." Then, in a bitter tone, "And yet people rave about the tenderness of women, and call them the link that connects earth with heaven. The gentler sex. Pshaw! for cold-blooded cruelty, for passionless devilment, a woman is to a man what a hawk is to a dove, a tigress to a tame cat."

Celia raised her eyebrows slightly, then with a careless laugh, taking the Maltese in her arms: "Listen to him, Frou-Frou—this is the way he woos us, *belle petite*; what think you of his gallantry? Well bred, are you? Wise dog! cling to your ancestry; it excuses everything, *mignonne*, even rudeness."

Bertie clinched his teeth to suppress the impatient words that rose to his lips.

"Celia, listen to me," he said, after a short pause. "What spirit of evil can possess you? Is your vanity paramount to every other feeling? Can the miserable, contemptible rôle of coquette have any charm for you. Why do you treat me so?"

She kept her eyes fixed on the balcony, as if quite unconscious that he was speaking.

"Why don't you go and smoke?" she said, carelessly. "I wish I were a man that I might smoke. In Italy one could; but in prudish, formal England, it would be *outré*, I suppose. With a cigarette one can be unconscious of everything beside—deaf and dumb and blind to the world, living in cloudland, in the realms of smoke. *Ay de mi*, I wish I had one now."

"If that be your ambition—a destiny that begins in the obscurity of cloudland, embraces wealth and fame for an hour,

and ends in smoke—I think it's likely to be realized," retorted Bertie, with a savage sarcasm.

An angry gleam shot from her eye as he uttered this rude speech, but it speedily died away, and she replied in a careless tone, "*Eh bien!* we shall see: but don't attempt to cast my horoscope; the charm of the future lies in its mystery. Ah me! what wretched, contemptible, spirit-broken creatures we should be if we saw it all. We dream of fame, we die in obscurity; we are sanguine of thousands, we win only hundreds; we hope for happiness, we suffer sorrow; we sow in joy, we reap in tears."

She finished speaking in a tone of cynical recklessness that was common with her.

"Life need have no such dismal future for you, Celia," pleaded Bertie, earnestly. "You know I love you—I have thought you loved me in return—"

Celia interrupted him with a merry, careless laugh. It was her nature to change her mood almost as often as she spoke.

"Are you laughing, Frou-Frou?" holding the little white silken mass to her cheek. "Is he not droll, *chère belle*? As if one could help loving so handsome and fine a gentleman; as if poor, frail woman could withstand his gallantry and *beaux yeux*; as if the coldest heart could continue cold before his ancestry and thirteen quarterings! We do love him, don't we, *belle*?—because he is so funny—and makes us laugh."

With an angry gesture and muttered curse, Bertie rose abruptly and walked towards the open window. But the rudeness of his manner passed unnoticed by Celia, who, throwing herself back in her fauteuil, was dreamily watching Guy, with half-closed eyes, as if oblivious of all beside. "If *he* would love me," she murmured, "if he would only love me."

Though they were unconscious of the fact, Guy had been silently regarding them from the balcony. An anxious look of annoyance came over his face as he noted Celia's half impatient, half weary, wholly indifferent manner, and contrasted it with the reckless yearning of his brother.

That Bertie was in the toils there could be no doubt—never did foolish fly flutter more hopelessly in spider's web; but would the spider fasten her fangs, and suck her victim's heart's-blood from him, or was she lying in ambush for larger game, and fearful of scaring it by showing the deadly grip of which those dainty hands were capable?

"After all, perhaps I wrong her," he thought, as he noted the sad look that once came over her face. "If she does plunder her victims without remorse, what woman doesn't? There may be much good, there's always some, lying hidden under that cold, hard manner, but Bertie's not the one to develop it. She's holding him for something, and I must save him, let the wrench cost what it may!" Then, as he saw Bertie turn angrily from her, "If I convince him that she doesn't love him, I may save him through his vanity—it's worth the trial."

As he approached, her eyes beamed with a pleased look, not of coquetry, but of real gratification.

"Ecarté, Deverell?" asked Slingsby, pointing to a table ready set. "Fortune's not half so expensive a mistress as Venus; one's blind, you know, and the other's so confoundedly wide awake," he continued, as Bertie seated himself. "What shall it be? something small—suppose we say ponies?"

Guy leant over Celia, speaking to her in low tones of fair Italia, of the bright, sunny land of her birth; and enchained her fancy, and revived her remembrance of the beautiful city from which she had long ago come. Her eyes flashed with pleasure, her cheeks glowed with her southern blood, as she listened enraptured to his voice. She was no longer acting a part.

As her warm breath fanned his face he again felt the sensuous delirium of a dream, and though no spark of love for her possessed him, he seemed enthralled, intoxicated by the power of her beauty. As her hand lingered in his, and she murmured an adieu, he felt how fatal would her power be to one who loved her; how his wealth and life and honor, ay, even his soul, would be yielded up if she so willed it.

Yet, hard and cold and cruel as she was, deadly in her revenge, relentless in her hate, her heart yearned to him with a pure and holy love; a love that ennobled, for it made her feel her own unworthiness.

"That makes a hundred," said Slingsby, as Bertie rose angrily from the table. "Something wrong, eh, Deverell? Never saw you play so badly, by Jove!"

"I thought you said you did not know Estelle?" said Bertie in an angry tone, after he and Guy had walked in silence some distance homewards.

"Did I say so?" replied Guy, lighting a cigar. "No, don't think I did. I've met her once or twice before."

He hesitated rather at the deception his words conveyed.

"Pity you didn't act up to all your precepts," said Bertie, with a sneer. "I'll tell you what, Guy, I hate cant in any one; you lecture me about this woman, and preach about her as a parson does of the bottomless pit, and then carry on with her yourself."

"But I don't fall in love with her—don't you see the difference? Tiger-hunting's capital sport; but you must kill the tiger, he mustn't kill you. One looks down the crater of a volcano *pour s'amuser*; one doesn't plunge into it."

"Oh, hang your cold-blooded sophistry." He spoke petulantly. "You pretend to have some sort of affection for me, you give yourself all kinds of airs as my guardian, and then, by Heaven! you humiliate me before Estelle—go in for cutting me out, because you think she cares for me, because you know I value her love—"

Guy interrupted him with a provoking laugh.

"How you rave, young one; I didn't think you so easily taken in. Know she cares for you! Pshaw! It's because I know she doesn't care for you that I amused myself with her to-night. 'Pon my honor," he continued, knocking the ash from his cigar, "she's very handsome, talks and dresses well, which is more than can be said for most women of her monde,

or any other. She's a wonderful actress, too; so she ought to be—she's always acting, on the stage and off; works up the agony splendidly, does the tendresse to a nicety, doesn't overdo it; but as for *l'amour sérieux*, there's only one person she cares a rap about, and that's—herself."

"What refreshing modesty!" said Bertie, with a sneer, his lip quivering with anger. "You don't do yourself justice; you detract from the glory of your conquest."

"There's not much glory in a conquest that is bought, I take it. It comes to be a question of the balance at one's banker's, then. You're not so green as to think that the Squire of Erlesmere, with his rent-roll, isn't more than a match for his younger brother, with such a woman as that—are you? A three-figured cheque would speak more eloquently than all your love-sick speeches. Women like Estelle don't go in for sentiment—it's waste of time, and doesn't pay. We part here, I suppose. Good-night, young one!"

Bertie took the proffered hand sulkily.

"Pshaw! You're like the naughty boy that cried for the moon. I shall fancy you're jealous, if you look so savage. By-by! See you again soon."

And Guy turned up Bond Street.

The moment he was alone all his gayety and assumed carelessness faded utterly, and his brow contracted fiercely.

There was a passionate revolt against the part he had chosen to play, a bitter heart-sickness upon him.

It might be that it was necessary to use violent means to cure Bertie of his folly; but it was hard that he, Guy Lawrence, should be the operator whose hand must inflict the wound; harder still to know that he must seem treacherous and ungenerous in his young brother's eyes.

His own future rose before him, blackly and drearily, and he knew that it would be long before peace or forgetfulness could come to him; he knew that his love for the girl who had shattered all his hopes that day was not a thing to be easily buried in oblivion.

But still he would not take consolation from that last refuge of wounded vanity, and think himself a martyr. "It's only my fate. How could she help it, poor little girl?" he said to himself. He thought too little of himself and his own deserts to consider it at all wonderful she had rejected him so unequivocally, or to blame her, and imagine himself hardly and cruelly dealt with. But there is a limit to human endurance, and all these things combined had almost tried his to the utmost.

To take refuge in flight was a confession of weakness, and yet he resolved that he would go away for a few days, until he had learnt to face this, his last and greatest trouble, as calmly as he desired.

"Pack my portmanteau," he said to his man that night. "I shall go to Erlesmere to-morrow. You can stay here; I shall only be away a few days."

And Guy Lawrence left town the following morning.

CHAPTER XIX.



ONCE a year, on the birthday of her eldest little girl, Mrs. Hoare, who delighted in an excuse for free-and-easy, out-of-the-way entertainments, gave what she called a children's picnic.

There were a few children invited thereto, but the majority of the guests were decidedly "grown up," though some of them were as gay, as light-hearted, as full of delight at a day's release from London formalities as the smaller portion of the assembly, who were usually, at the beginning of the entertainment, rather oppressed by the cares of their best frocks.

People were wont to enjoy these informal picnics more than the best of the grand dinners eaten *al fresco*, which usually went by the name; whereat there was no release from the

usual monotonies, except the pleasure derived from getting the cramp by sitting in an uneasy posture on the ground, or the excitement of making an occasional raid upon adventurous spiders.

Mrs. Hoare invited no acquaintances, only friends; and insisted on a real, veritable picnic, in which they all waited upon themselves and each other, dispensed with the powdered footmen and their troublesome grandeur, and made merry over the usual mishaps inseparable from these sort of feasts.

This year the Grayhound, at Hampton, was to be their head-quarters, and a remote nook among the trees in Bushy Park their dining-room. There was to be music and dancing at the hotel after the dinner, and they were all to drive home, not later than ten o'clock—"because of the children," Mrs. Hoare explained; but she was not a very strict disciplinarian, and there were some among her young friends, as she in the glory of her matronhood called them, who cherished hopes of keeping up the dancing to a much later hour.

But anyway the children must go. Having got up the picnic on purpose for them, it would not do to leave them at home; and so of course the little governess must go too, whether she liked it or not. She did not like it. She pleaded hard to be let off, for fond as she had once been of gayeties, her heart was too sore for her to take any pleasure in them now.

But Mrs. Hoare, in her gay, coaxing manner, urged upon her how impossible it was to trust the children to other care, how she would have to look after them all day herself if Miss Lorton refused to come; and pleaded so hard for her help and her presence, that Kitty, always easily influenced by kind persuasions, gave up her objections and promised to go.

And then she had to make another concession. One morning Mrs. Hoare came into the school-room and began chattering in her gay way, and by degrees led round to the one inexhaustible subject of interest to womankind—dress; and then "What was Miss Lorton going to wear at the picnic?"

Kitty looked down ruefully at her black dress—the best she had; at the worn, brownish crêpe and general dowdiness. And then it came out, little by little, that Mrs. Hoare, like many other gay people, had an insuperable dislike to mourning—not to black, worn as a set-off to fair skins with the relief of some other color; but to mourning, crêpe and heavy materials, worn in memory of the dead, and so a reminder of death. That was a word which had power to make pretty butterfly Mrs. Hoare turn pale; a thought which, with all her real kindness of heart, her *débonnaire* generosity, her more than surface goodness, she could not bear to face.

And so she begged that Kitty, to please her, would cast aside her heavy black for one day, and then half blushing, and hesitating, she added, “Would Miss Lorton allow her to tell her maid to make up some pretty half-mourning dress, that would be light and cool for this hot summer weather?”

But Miss Lorton was very proud, and though she could not quite take offence—the offer was kindly made and delicately worded—she was very near doing so, and declined rather brusquely.

“If you desire it,” she said, casting a sorrowful glance at her black, “I will find some other dress. I have some, made long ago, and scarcely worn.”

Mrs. Hoare was too true a lady to press the subject any further; she made a slight apology for having mentioned it. “It was only a prejudice of hers, and she hoped Miss Lorton would forgive her.”

And so Kitty rummaged among her stock of half-forgotten dresses, all neatly folded up and put away when she went into mourning for her father, months ago, and selected a delicate white cambric, made of the softest and finest material, but in a fashion somewhat gone by. So it came to pass that Kitty stood before her glass one bright morning in the beginning of July, and put the finishing touches to her toilette, not without some slight satisfaction at the improvement in her own appearance. She had grown too pale for black lately, but she was fair

enough and young enough to make the white dress infinitely becoming.

It was made very long and perfectly plain, and was remarkable for the absence of the furbelows, frills, and paniers which were then the fashion; only one deep flounce at the bottom of the skirt, edged with delicate lace, and frills on the tight sleeves and on the neck, and a broad black sash round her small waist, and a black ribbon encircling her throat. Her hair was all coiled up round her head, and shone brightly under her little round black hat. And such a refined, delicate face it was underneath the hat; with great, sad, wide-apart eyes, and sensitive mouth—over-pale perhaps for health or beauty, but wonderfully pure and sweet.

Kitty looked at herself in the glass and thought that in spite of the improvement in dress she was wofully altered.

All her pretty bright color had gone, all the *verve* and sparkle of former days, which had made her so bewitching, had fled. She did not know that in their place had come that which was infinitely better, but she could miss that which had gone—and sigh over it too.

For what woman, however sad she may be, however far apart from the world her life may have become, can reconcile herself, without a great many heart-pangs, to the loss of beauty?

Not Kitty Lorton, you may be sure—the vain little coquette, who had loved to feel the power of her fascinations. Once a coquette, always a coquette; and though circumstances had apparently blotted out this trait in her character, the vanity was there still, only it was lying dormant.

It was still sufficiently strong to make Kitty shrink from going into society in which she must appear at a disadvantage. She pictured herself as she would appear among the crowd of gayly-dressed, fashionable *grandes dames*, and felt how strangely unlike them she would be in everything. How utterly alone among those who were all friends with each other, but not with her.

Even Guy Lawrence, the only one of them all who had ever been her friend, would not be there. She had heard Mrs. Hoarê regretting that "Cousin Guy" could not come, and Kitty, in her heart, had guessed that he would not come because she would be there.

Was she sorry or glad? She scarcely knew. She felt sure that if he were there he would not speak to her; but she longed with a strange longing to see his face once more, though it could only be at a distance. For she felt now that more than a week had elapsed, and all vague hopes had died away, that he and she would never again meet as they had once met—stand together as they had once stood, hand to hand, and soul to soul, with the consciousness of love in their hearts. As lovers, they would meet nevermore. Half tremblingly, yet with a proud, still face, Kitty went down into the drawing-room with her dressed-out pupils, and stood among the crowd of gay people who were already assembled preparatory to a start, and after a few kind greetings from those who knew her, and some pleasant words from Mrs. Hoare, she shrank away into the background and tried to hide herself.

But she did not pass unnoticed. Most of the ladies were attired in the most picturesque costumes, and with their fanciful bright-colored dresses, their floating ribbons, their short, flounced petticoats, their coquettish, flower-decked heads, formed a brilliant Watteau-like picture, in the background of which Kitty, in her floating white dress, was strangely conspicuous for her unlikeness to them all.

She was acutely sensible of every one of the wondering glances that were cast in her direction, and felt sure that they were all disparaging: but in that she was mistaken. Picture to yourself one of the fair girls, whom Leslie delights to paint with such inimitable delicacy, standing among a group of Dresden-china shepherdesses, and you will imagine the contrast she presented to those by whom she was surrounded.

Many eye-glasses, many admiring half-stares were directed to her corner, and brought a little pink flush to her pale cheeks

that lent her the only charm she lacked, for she misinterpreted them all; she thought these people were quizzing her, and hated them in her heart for their rudeness.

What a relief it was when a move was made towards the carriages! The youngest of her little charges, a pretty, fair-haired mite, still clung timidly to Kitty's skirts, but at that moment with a sudden cry she let go her hold, and sprang towards the door, and Kitty, following her movements, saw the cause of her excitement. Guy Lawrence had entered the room, "Cousin Guy," the favorite of the children, whose advent was always hailed with the most exuberant delight, though he was generally so grave and quiet of late that it was difficult to discover wherein lay the attraction he possessed for them. But children in their attachments often show the same instinctive knowledge of character that dogs do. The best and most honest of men are generally marked out by them for their preference. There are, of course, children and children; as well as dogs and dogs. The dog who measures his love by the size of the bone that is thrown to him; the child who values his elders according to the amount of sugar-plums and gifts bestowed upon him. But little innocent children—not those precocious monstrosities who are small men and women before they leave the nursery—often choose out for their devotion those who have no outward attraction. The world's veneer goes for nothing with them; fine clothes, false smiles, delicate affectations, are all thrown away upon them.

Men and women who are false and unreal may go bravely, unfearful of detection, among their fellow men and women, and they will shrink from the innocent scrutiny of a child's eyes.

It spoke well for Guy Lawrence that children always loved him. His face brightened into a smile as the little child pressed her way through the crowd, and placed her tiny hand in his large one, with a confiding grasp.

"Well, Mignonette," he said, looking tenderly down into the upturned face, "are you glad to see me?"

"O, Cousin Guy, we thought you wouldn't come. I'm so glad. Mamma! Have you seen mamma?"

Mrs. Hoare turned round at the sound of the baby voice, and welcomed him with her ever-ready smile.

"Guy, I am so pleased. So you have got back from Erlesmere? Bertie assured us you would not be here, and he himself has gone off to Lady Danvers' morning party—naughty boy!"

"I was obliged to go down a day or two on business. But I am detaining you, Clara. I'm afraid I am very late," answered Guy, rather abstractedly; for his eyes, wandering round the room, had fallen on what they sought—a little white-robed girl standing alone and looking miserably conscious of her loneliness.

He made his way across the room, and held out his hand to her. He knew well how neglected she was feeling just then, and that it was no time to remember the estrangement which existed between them.

"How good of Guy!—so like him," thought Mrs. Hoare. "He always finds out the most friendless girl and takes care of her."

Poor little Kitty! How intensely shy she felt as she looked up and met the grave, kind eyes bent on her; how miserably guilty and ashamed of herself! Perhaps Guy was conscious of her embarrassment, for he only spoke a few words to her, and then turned to a man who was standing near, ogling Kitty in the hope of an introduction. She seized her opportunity, and slipping away, encountered Mrs. Hoare, and found herself consigned to a carriage-full of strangers, with Mignonette perched on her lap.

She began to think that picnics were wretched mistakes. She took very small part in the chatter that went on in an endless stream between the two girls and an insipid youth, an ensign in the Guards, who had fallen to her lot as companions for the drive. She dreamily watched the passing objects, and speculated on the possibility of deriving any enjoyment from these sort of entertainments.

"Perhaps it is only that *les raisins sont verts*," she thought to herself. "Once I should have been wild with joy at the mere idea of a picnic. It is only that everything is different now; that I am not as other girls are. I have no friends—don't let me try to salve over the truth—I have no attention paid to me, I am despised and neglected; that is why I hate these sort of things now."

Poor little girl! She was in the same mood when they had all alighted from the carriages and assembled at the hotel—when the bevy of gay ladies vanished upstairs to administer *poudre de riz* to their flushed cheeks and dainty finishing touches to their ruffled plumage; and the gentlemen lighted their cigars, looked up hampers of some pet wine, and quaffed copious draughts of brandy-and-soda.

She crept away through the wide-opened front door, and with a few swift steps found herself under the far-famed trees of Bushy Park. It was so hot and dusty and arid—the ground was strewn, too, with dirty newspapers and broken wine-bottles; and the air was noisy with coarse babble—not with the songs of birds—and was scented with the unmistakable odor of dirty school-children and London holiday-makers, not with the delicate fragrance of summer flowers. Country-born Kitty turned up her nose at the ruralism of Cockneys. "This was what they called country. Bah! they had better keep to their sun-bleached parks and dusty streets than make believe at Arcadian delights."

She was fretted and chafed by her own troubles. She was looking at everything through spectacles that cast a dim shadow over all the bright landscape, but little by little, as she wandered on under the shady trees, where the great destructive unwashed had not penetrated, her heart yielded to the gentle influences of the scene—the soft air, the universal gladness; the stillness soothed her into restfulness, and filled her with memories of the past.

She sat down to rest under a tree, and fell into a reverie which had lost half its bitterness, but was still tinged with

that sort of *pitié de soi-même* which had become habitual to her in these days. She did not remain long in solitude. Merry voices, peals of laughter rang on the air—the picnickers were straying thither in search of a spot for their repast, and, as it always falls out somehow on these occasions, they had grouped themselves into couples, and were wandering tête-à-tête under the delicious shade of the overspreading trees.

But Kitty remained unnoticed; they all passed her by, unseeing, till little Mignonette spied the gleam of a white dress among the bushes, and leaping through them with airy footsteps, threw herself laughing and breathless among the folds of it.

"Oh, Miss Lorton, it's so nice! Why have you hidden yourself? Mamma wanted you; and they are all coming! Look! there's Mrs. Vane and papa, and there—see! there's Cousin Guy and Aunt Lily!"

Yes, there was Cousin Guy bending over the fairest of all Mrs. Hoare's fair sisters. What a pang of unreasonable jealousy shot through Kitty's heart as she saw him! What she had resigned herself, she could not willingly see become the property of another. And what a mean, poor love was this which he had pretended to feel for her—so easily forgotten, so lightly cast aside.

With all a woman's unreasonableness, she mentally condemned him as a male flirt, a would-be lady-killer, because she saw him leaning over a pretty girl; and she jumped up with a sudden scorn of herself that she had been making moan over the loss of this man's love—a man who was probably only capable of a passing tendresse for every pretty face. She forgot the absurdity of her mental accusation, the improbability that he would ever have asked her to marry him had he not loved her. She remembered nothing but that he, looking tender admiration on soft blue eyes and golden hair, had passed her by unseen.

"Did you say your mamma was looking for me? Come, Mignonette, we will go to her," she said, with sudden energy.

"There she is," answered the child. "Come, let us run, Miss Lorton, and we shall catch her up."

And so they joined themselves to Mrs. Hoare, and Kitty threw aside her shyness, and with her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling, mingled in the throng.

A man who had been attentively observing her ever since her entrance into the drawing-room, and who had been fruitlessly asking "Who is she?" of all his friends, made his way to his hostess, and drawled out a request for an introduction to the young lady in white.

"If it isn't too much trouble. Really, I scarcely like to ask you to move a quarter of a yard this weather, it is so fatiguing."

"It's not the slightest trouble," answered Mrs. Hoare; and with just the slightest hesitation, she gave the required introduction.

Kind as she was, it had never occurred to her possible that little Gerald Peake, one of the catches of the season, should desire to know her governess; and though she had no choice but to give the introduction now it had been asked for, she felt just a little piqued that he, the most fastidious and lazy of men, should be attracted by Kitty Lorton when he had not taken to either of her golden-haired sisters.

Moreover Gerry Peake had just come into an enormous fortune, and enterprising matrons were calculating on the chances of his marrying. Very small chances they were, if only they had known it—for little Gerry was an insatiable flirt, and never meant anything serious by the most desperate of his flirtations. Just twenty-seven, with nothing to do and more money than he could possibly spend, he had the run of all the boudoirs and drawing-rooms in London, and he made women his sole study and amusement, priding himself on the refinement of his taste and the discrimination he displayed in the selection of the fair ladies whom he honored with his passing attentions. "His only books were women's looks," and folly was indeed all they had taught him. And yet on the principle

of doing only one thing, and doing it well, this man was, I suppose, successful.

Somehow or other he had gained a name as a tolerably good woman-critic. Men who were far cleverer and socially greater than himself, were apt to defer to his judgment in these matters, and his praise was often the groundwork of a woman's reputation as a beauty. His taste was unquestionably a pure and refined one, though you would scarcely have expected it from seeing the man himself; and he was very hard to please. Therefore it was that Mrs. Hoare raised her eyebrows in momentary though well-concealed astonishment, when Gerald Peake put himself out of his way to make the acquaintance of her little governess. Women are so apt to be blind, really and truly, not spitefully blind, to the beauty of their fellow-women; or rather, I should say, that which men find beautiful does not excite their admiration. Men's beauties and women's beauties are so proverbially different. If Mrs. Hoare had been asked if Kitty was pretty, she would probably have replied, "She is rather nice-looking, poor little thing!" in that kind, would-not-be-disparaging way of hers, all the while genuinely believing that she was doing Kitty more than justice, instead of less. The little pale face, with its sad eyes, had no attractions for her, whose idea of the beautiful was a brilliant *tout ensemble* of rosy cheeks, blue eyes, laughing lips, and golden hair.

But Gerald Peake found some wonderful charm in it. He threw himself by Kitty's side and waited on her with the most devoted attention, and seemed as if he would never tire of looking into her sweet dark eyes, and listening to her soft laughter and gay sallies.

Such a noise there was with the ceaseless chatter, the popping of champagne and soda-water. Kitty felt in a whirl with the unusual excitement; and the consciousness that Guy Lawrence, seated opposite, was casting momentary grave glances at herself and her companion, only made her the brighter and merrier.

She was but a bad actress, after all; a greater adept at the art would not have overdone it as she did. Any one not blinded by love and growing jealousy, as Guy Lawrence was, would have learnt she was not indifferent to him, by the very care she took to prove that she was. As it was, he was condemning her much as she had condemned him—as a heartless flirt.

"I should like to go on eating strawberries and cream forever, *comme ça*. What a pity it is life can't be all 'beer and skittles,'" said Gerald Peake, in a sentimental tone; for champagne, sunshine, and soft coquettish glances were doing their work with him.

"I dare say we should get wondrously tired of it if it was. Even picnics—though I must confess they are delightful—would pall after a while," soliloquized Kitty.

"Yes: if we were condemned to eat our dinners forever *al fresco*—sitting on straw, like Marjory Daw," said little Peake, with a glance at the temporary seats he had constructed for himself and Kitty from the débris of the hampers, "and to drink our champagne flavored with earwigs, we might think it a bore. Half the things which we do now for amusement, if we were compelled to do them, we should consider it an awful hardship. Have a peach, Miss Lorton?"

"Thank you," answered Kitty, looking contemplatively at the round soft fruit. "I suppose it is that I haven't brushed the bloom off my peach yet; I have scarcely tasted the sweetness of amusement, so I haven't tired of it."

"You have not been out much?" asked her companion, with languid curiosity. "Ah well, you will find that amusements, like peaches, lose their charm with their rarity. These June peaches are luxuries because they are scarce and costly, but we cease to care for them in August, when they are really far better and cost a tenth part of their present price. It is the same *partout*, peaches and picnics; you will find, Miss Lorton, both cease to please you when they have grown common, everyday affairs."

"This is likely to be my first and my last peach and picnic. So I mean to make the most of both," she answered, with the half-serious, half-mocking laugh which puzzled Gerald Peake.

"Haven't you come out? That accounts for my not having seen you anywhere in town. I shall look forward with the greatest delight to the day when you will become one of us," he answered, looking admiringly at the little face, whose sweet childishness was to him its greatest charm. "I heard you were staying with Mrs. Hoare, but you don't appear even at her parties—how is that? Are they keeping you dark, like a young horse, that you may come out with a rush, and become first favorite?"

A deep crimson flush suffused the girl's face. She had for the moment forgotten her own station in society, and now she must confess it. She hated herself for the paltriness of a pride that made her ashamed of the truth—that made her shrink from the surprise which she knew this man would show when he heard who and what she was.

"I shall never come out. I have nothing to do with that sort of thing. I am only Mrs. Hoare's governess," she said, very quietly and proudly, looking at him steadily as she spoke.

Gerry Peake prided himself on his perfect tact and control over his own countenance, but even he could not quite subdue a momentary look of astonishment at the idea that this girl, whom he had singled out as the prettiest and most distinguished-looking of Mrs. Hoare's guests, was only the governess; but he was, with all his faults, too true a gentleman to increase her embarrassment by word or manner.

The tone in which he answered was perfectly easy and unconstrained.

"Really, you look only a child yourself. I thought you were scarcely out of the school-room. You must pardon me if I haven't treated you with the distant respect befitting your advanced years."

Kitty laughed quite lightly again, and Gerald Peake exerted himself to be even more amusing than before. To do him

justice, he was quite above the smallness of valuing people according to their social position. A pretty girl was a pretty girl, to him, whether she was the descendant of a hundred earls or the daughter of a crossing-sweeper. It mattered little to him who she was, as long as she was refined. He did not affect pretty *paysannes*; but this girl was a lady, a thorough-bred little lady too, and the annoyance he had felt at hearing that she was not one of his own order, arose purely from the fact that all hope of pursuing what promised to be a very pleasant flirtation was thereby nipped in the bud.

Kitty felt intensely grateful to him for his tact and kindness. She had grown to dread slights, to look out for them, and sometimes she imagined them when they had not been intended, and therefore appreciated the more frank friendliness and kind attentions of this man, and she looked up at him with her eloquent eyes in a way that made Gerald Peake feel the task to which he had set himself, the endeavor to chase away the cloud which had fallen on her fair face, a very pleasant one.

He told little racy stories, repeated well-known bon-mots and jokes that were all new to Kitty, and listened with delight to the light *méchante* laughter which they elicited, sublimely unconscious that the man with the bronzed face opposite was inwardly condemning him as "an insane little humbug."

Somehow Kitty managed to bring down general disapprobation on her unfortunate little head before she arose from her seat of straw. Gerald Peake's attentions, and her very warm reception of them, were the objects of unqualified censure.

"So very forward—would you believe it? Only a sort of nursery governess—great mistake to bring her here at all. Clara always does these sort of things—so quixotic and generous, you know," said an old aunt, all *moiré antique* and Honiton lace, regarding the offender through a double eye-glass with a supercilious scrutiny.

"She is but a child," replied the person whom she addressed—a man, of course. "It's only natural she should

enjoy herself; I dare say it's quite an unusual excitement for her, poor little girl!"

But no pity did Kitty receive from the fairer portion of the party; even Mrs. Hoare opened her bright eyes in mild surprise. "It's always the way with those girls who seem so very quiet—still waters run deep."

So when they all rose up and went their several ways, Kitty found herself shunned by every one, and but for little Gerald Peake, who saw pretty well how the land lay and could not find it in his heart to desert her, she would have been absolutely forsaken.

"I think I must go," stammered Kitty, when she found herself alone with him, one of a number of parties *à deux* that were strolling through the grounds of Hampton Court; "I must see after the children."

"No, you must not—the young 'uns are all right, they are on in front with Hoare—heard him promise to take them on the water, and you must let me stay with you while I can. It's an awful bore, but I'm due in town at eight. My sister gives a dinner, and would break her heart if I shirked it; but there's lots of time before. What shall we do?"

"I don't know—I don't care," she answered, constrainedly. All her excitement had faded now Guy Lawrence was no longer near to see her, and she began to remember what she had before been oblivious to: that this man, a stranger to her until to-day, might misinterpret her words and actions—that he must be thinking how flighty and foolish she was, that he might almost be excused for thinking her "fast."

She began to feel acutely the awkwardness of the situation in which, partly through her own fault, she found herself placed, and to long to hide herself away, anywhere, out of the sight of everybody.

"If there was only one girl of all the party who would not look coldly at me if I joined myself to her!—but there's not," she thought, bitterly.

The more *empressé* her companion became, the quieter and

more subdued grew Kitty, till at last Gerald Peake began to think she was not half such good fun as he had at first thought her.

Under the dark screen of the old trees that grew round the house where kings once held their revelry and whispered their love—through the dim ancient passages, out again into the burning sun, Kitty followed unresistingly, knowing not how to make her escape; but at length she paused.

"Will you excuse me?" she said, lifting up her beseeching eyes to his face. "I think I will find my way back to the hotel. My head aches with the glare of the sun, and Mrs. Hoare may want me—may wonder where I am."

"I was going to take you on the river; see, it is only a few steps farther, and it will do your head good—there is a breeze on the water. I am afraid you have been walking too much. Is it very bad?"

He spoke with such kind solicitude that she looked at him gratefully.

"Not very; you are very kind—but I think I'd rather not go."

Gerald Peake thought that he divined the cause of her hesitation—that it arose from a reluctance to go with him alone—and he was silent for a minute, till a turn in the road brought them in full sight of the river and of a party of people arranging themselves for a start. Kitty drew back—she had no wish to be seen or to go amongst those who did not want her—but it was too late.

"Hullo, Peake!" cried a voice from the boat. "You're just the fellow we want. Come and make up our crew. Come along, Miss Lorton; plenty of room."

But Kitty shook her head.

"You go, please," she said, looking at her companion; "I want to go back. Tell Mr. Hoare I have a headache, and dread the sun."

Gerald Peake went to the water's edge and explained to his

host the cause of their hesitation. Mr. Hoare jumped on shore and went up to Kitty.

"Come along, Miss Lorton; the air will do you good, and you shall keep quiet and rest—you look very tired. Here's Mignonette in despair because she had lost you."

He took her hand kindly as he spoke and helped her into the boat. It was a large one, and the party consisted of himself and Guy Lawrence, the two children, and their pretty aunt, Lily Ransford. There was just room to squeeze Kitty into the stern, and Gerald Peake pulled off his coat and took an oar.

Out on the water, floating gently with the tide, the cool air fanning her heated face, resting quietly with her eyes wandering dreamily over the still summer landscape, there fell on her a sort of calm, which even the consciousness of Guy Lawrence's presence could not destroy. Glad enough to follow the general advice and keep quiet, she listened wearily to the monotonous swish of the oars, and looked down into the clear depths of the water in a dreamy restfulness, in which the minutes passed unnoticed, scarcely hearing the gay chatter and the merry laughter, seldom speaking herself, till her reverie was broken by the grating of the boat on the shore, and Gerald Peake jumped out.

"Good-by, Miss Lorton; I must make haste to catch my train. I hope your head will be better soon."

And with a feeling of relief she heard him make his adieux to the others, and saw him turn away and disappear in the distance.

"How much farther are we going, papa?" asked Mignonette, raising her golden head from its resting-place in Kitty's lap.

"Only back to the landing-place, *petite*, and then we must go and see after mamma."

Kitty sighed. They must go back then to the crowd of people, whom with her present consciousness of general condemnation, she felt ashamed to face.

She glanced at Guy. How grave, and quiet, and stern he looked. She knew that he was condemning her too.

Poor little Kitty! If she had been silly, it was certain that her shame and contrition were disproportionate to her offence.

When Guy jumped from the boat and lifted out the two children, Kitty, who was nearest, drew back, and golden-haired Lily held out her hand for his assistance, and sprang lightly on shore.

"I've robbed the water of its fairest lily," he said, with a smile, and then he turned and waited with outstretched hand for Kitty.

She pushed it angrily aside, but as her foot was on the gunwale and she prepared to jump ashore, the boat suddenly lurched and destroyed her balance; recovering herself in some degree, she made a spring, but in the fright she misjudged the distance, and touching the shore at a spot where it sloped abruptly, her foot slipped, and she sank to the ground with a low cry of pain.

Only Guy heard it, for the others had moved on; but at the sound all his anger was forgotten, and he bent over her tenderly and raised her up.

"It is nothing," she said, disengaging herself from his grasp. "Only—my foot. I'm all right." But her white lips and quivering face belied her words.

"You have hurt yourself," he said very gravely. "Is it your foot?"

"Yes, I turned it a little—only a little. I can walk now."

He did not answer her or offer her his help again, but he looked down on her with a pained, grieved look, as she wilfully persisted in trying to walk unaided.

She had sprained her ankle, and each time she attempted to put her foot to the ground, her brow contracted and she set her teeth with the pain. Desperate with the dread of being left alone with Guy Lawrence, and the knowledge that in spite of all her efforts each minute increased the distance between herself and the others, she nerved herself with a terrible energy

to overcome the deadly faintness that was creeping over her, and to hide her agony from him. The view became indistinct, the trees danced confusedly before her eyes, each limb trembled convulsively, and she felt half suffocated with the attempt to keep back the moans which came to her lips. She tried to calculate the distance to the hotel. What a weary, interminable road it seemed to her, when each step was terrible torture! Every moment the pain grew worse. She saw the last gleam of Lily Ransford's dress as it disappeared round a corner, and then all the bright landscape became a blurred mass, a terrible chaos of misery and pain; she looked wildly round her, as if, with dumb instinct, she sought some friendly hand held out to support her. She turned on Guy an imploring helpless look of agonized entreaty. She stretched out her hands towards him, and, with a low cry, tottered forward. He caught her in his arms, and as he clasped her to him, heard the half-uttered words that were dying on her lips.

"Oh, Guy, Guy—"

His own name—only that—spoken lovingly, entreatingly, with such a yearning wistfulness, as she fell back unconscious.

He looked down on the little white face that lay on his shoulder in death-like stillness, and tried in vain to still the tumult in his heart. Was it only his fancy that made him think there was entreaty for forgiveness in her words, and in her looks an unconscious confession of a love she had denied?

He unfastened the little black hat, and pushed back the sunny, rippling hair from her cold, white brow. The childish face that lay so close to his own, in the trustfulness of utter helplessness, stirred all his pulses with the fever of a passion that was hard to control; but he raised her in his arms with the tender respectfulness of a man who touches a sacred thing, though his very tenderness was almost a caress.

He carried her gently in his arms as he would have carried a sleeping child; but all the while he looked down on the cold, white face with a terrible longing to kiss the lips he loved so well.

"My darling, my darling," he muttered, unconsciously clasping her closer to him, as he hurried forward with steps scarcely impeded by his burden.

He would fain have lingered by the way—it was such utter joy to hold her in his arms—to feel that for the moment she was his, and his alone. He felt, as he looked down on the death-like calm of her face, that he would rather hold her so—dead—than see her, as he had seen her a few hours ago, in the fulness of health and beauty, coquetting with another.

As he paused for a moment under the deep shadow of the heavy trees, and gazed at her, he felt as if he were in a cruelly sweet dream—one of those semi-trances, in which even while we dream we know that it is but a dream; we retain a consciousness of the wakening that must come, and fear to move lest we should break the spell.

He was but mortal, and the desire to snatch her to his heart and cover her face with passionate kisses struggled for a moment with the loyalty which forbade him to take the smallest advantage of her unconsciousness. It was but for a moment, and then again he hurried on at his utmost speed. Through the gloom, out into the light, past the group of men assembled at the hotel door, he bore his senseless burden, neither heeding their remarks nor answering their questions; never pausing till he laid her down on a couch, and then with one long, lingering look he turned and left her.

He stood at the door of the room, keeping guard like a sentinel over her, refusing entrance to those who, in their curiosity, would have crowded round the fainting girl, until Mrs. Hoare came in answer to his message; and then with a few words of explanation he gave Kitty into the care which could do more for her than his could, and making his cousin promise to send for him should his help be needed, went away by himself.

He waited outside the hotel until the sun sank behind the clouds and the swift-coming twilight was wrapping the earth in a veil of gray mistiness. Only the sound of dance-music and

of merry laughter broke the stillness of the evening, and a cool breeze sprang up and fanned his heated face. But he heard nothing, felt nothing, but the sound of an entreating voice murmuring, "Guy—Guy!" and the pressure of two tiny outstretched hands.

His heart and brain were in a tumult—the tumult of renewed hope.

He did not see Kitty again until the carriage was summoned that was to take her home. He helped to carry her to the door almost in silence, but as he stooped to arrange the cushions, he bent his head, and looked into the small white face almost tenderly. "You are better now?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, so much; but I can never thank you. Will you forgive me for—for *all* the trouble I've caused you?"

She spoke tremblingly, almost imploringly—and for a moment their eyes met.

What was there in that look to set both their hearts beating? A confession of love—a prayer for forgiveness—regret for the past—hope for the future?

Whatever it may have been, the remembrance of it lingered with both of them long after they had parted, and the carriage, with its spanking horses and bright lights, throwing a strange, flickering gleam on the girl's pale face, had borne her away into the distance.

Kitty, leaning back on her cushions, and looking out into the bright, starlit evening, felt a vague happiness, a sense of tranquillity, to which, in her constant fretting against her fate, she had long been a stranger. She fell into a waking dream of what might yet be; of a time when Guy Lawrence, no longer cold and hard, but loving and gentle as he had been to-night, would listen to a confession from her reluctant, trembling lips, of a love which she had cruelly and falsely denied.

In the darkness and silence—for her only companion, a used-up old lady, who had been willing enough to retire early from the festive scene, and take Kitty in her carriage to town, had fallen into the sleep of the just—the girl lay still and dreamed

her happy dreams ; till the quiet beauty of the summer evening, the sense of thankfulness, filled her eyes with sudden tears, and clasping her hands, her lips half formed a prayer that God would yet grant her this great happiness, ill-deserved though it was.

Knowing that Guy loved her, was it wrong that she should pray that He, in His great goodness, would grant that their two lives might yet be brought together, never to be sundered—never to be separated through life—unto death ?

And Guy stood by the hotel door and watched the carriage till it disappeared ; then he turned, and went out into the darkness under the trees, and made his way alone to the station.

He was in no mood to face a crowd, or to drive home with any one. He preferred solitude. There was no tranquillity for him—his brain was in a whirl ; an intangible joy, a half-realized hope, had upset the calm to which he had through much suffering attained ; and again he was mocked by the delusive will-o'-the-wisp dreams of supreme joy, which always fled from him ere he grasped them.

In vain he tried to break the spell which had fallen on him, to persuade himself of the unreality of these dreams, the impossibility of any hope existing still, when she on whose truth he would have staked his honor, had denied that she loved him. They would haunt him, and fill him with a feeling of elation. Undefined, unreal though his hopes might be ; built as they were on a few half-conscious words, on an imploring look, a momentary softening of manner, they had power to scare away the moody depression that had taken hold of him, and to make him suddenly light-hearted.

Bearing the heavy burden of his own troubles, which during the last week had seemed almost greater than he could bear, Guy had shrunk from society, and had hidden himself away in the country ; but now he began to think that in doing so he had almost shirked the duty which he had imposed upon himself, of watching over Bertie, and placing himself between him and danger, and had neglected to follow up the advantage he had gained at the supper-party.

When Guy reached Waterloo, he jumped into a Hansom, and looking at his watch, told the man to drive to Curzon Street.

CHAPTER XX.

FSTELLE the actress had not been in quite her usual "form" that night. She had been depressed, *ennuyée*; and though the public could see no fault in its favorite, she herself had been conscious that her acting had been almost tame, and wanting in its usual spirit.

Now she stood by the window, playing with the lace of the curtain, and looking up and down the street. Her usual languor seemed to have departed from her, and she was possessed with an unrestfulness very foreign to her ordinary manner.

She turned impatiently and looked up into the handsome face bent over her.

"You have the gift of silence to-night, *amico mio*," she said.

"How can I speak, when you forbid me to open my lips on the one subject which fills my heart and brain?" her companion answered, almost sadly. "How can I look at you, be near you, speak to you, without speaking of love?"

"Forbidden fruit, Bertie," she answered, with a mocking smile, "is always the sweetest. If I bade you speak to me of love, always love, nothing but love, you would soon grow weary of the same old story."

"Try me," he answered, with an earnestness which contrasted strangely with the lightness of her tone. "Give me the right to speak to you forever of my love, and you will find that I can never exhaust the endless theme. Give me but the right, and I will prove to you by every act of my life, my boundless, passionate devotion."

He paused for a moment, but she never spoke. She only

watched him with the cruel curiosity of a child watching a moth writhe in torture on the pin with which he has pierced it.

"The days of chivalry are past," he continued. "We do not die of love, or for love, now. We cannot fling away our lives in honor of the 'faire ladye' whose colors we wear; if we did, we should only get laughed at for our pains. But I am always dreaming of you, thinking of you; foolish dreams and thoughts, all of them; and sometimes I picture you to myself as 'La belle dame sans merci,' and myself as your knight, rescuing the glove you had thrown from your dainty hand among the lions. But there I end the story. I could not fling it back into your face—I could only go away, and—" He broke off suddenly, with a strange horror on his face. She was standing out on the balcony, leaning a little forward, and gazing down into the darkness underneath. It seemed almost as if, with the force of a vivid imagination, she was picturing the scene to herself, for a slow, half-triumphant smile curled her full lips, and a hard, cruel light gleamed in her great, panther-like eyes, half hidden, half revealed by the drooping lids. Such a strange resemblance she bore at that moment to the cold, cruel beauty who, in Leighton's picture, "Habet," holds down her white thumb as the death-warrant of a human creature, that Bertie Deverell involuntarily shrunk from her.

"Celia!" he exclaimed under his breath, "I sometimes think if I did not love you so intensely, I could almost hate you."

She smiled at his words. She knew so well that they were but a fresh proof of her own power. None knew better than she how to read a man's heart; and the hatred which fell to her lot as a necessary consequence of her brilliant career, was as sure a tribute to her vanity as the love. "Fiercest love makes fiercest hate"—one was as acceptable as the other.

"I am an actress," she said, as her face resumed its usual careless expression. "For a moment I imagined myself as the heroine of your by-gone romance. You are a foolish boy to take everything *au grand sérieux*."

"It's a fault I shall probably grow out of,"—answered Bertie, turning to light a cigarette; "I shall soon grow cold and frivolous and cruel under *your* tuition."

The sudden glare of the fusee fell on his worn, haggard face, and revealed it to a man who at that moment dashed up in a Hansom.

To Guy Lawrence that glimpse of his brother's face was a sudden recall to the realities of life from the unrealities of the over-sweet dreams in which he had been indulging during the drive from the station.

All the elation of spirit which he had felt since he had held Kitty in his arms and caught the half-uttered words that sprang to her lips in the moment of her weakness, fled from him, as again he realized that his mission in life was to suffer, not to enjoy; to help others, not himself; and that it remained unfulfilled while Bertie's fate was hanging in the balance.

His face was grave enough as he joined the two who stood in the balcony.

"I must ask you to excuse me for the lateness of my visit," he said, as he held Celia's hand and looked down into her beautiful face; "I only returned to town to-day, and could not come here before"—and then he turned, and held out his hand to his brother.

Bertie took it for a moment carelessly, never meeting Guy's eyes, for he could not take his own from Celia's face.

He watched with a scowl the rich flush that had sprung to her brow, which all her artifice could not conceal; and when he spoke, his voice was very low and quiet, but there was a malicious light in the blue eyes that never moved themselves from the fair face opposite to him.

"You are ubiquitous, *mon frère*. I met Bentham coming out of the Opera. He had been to Clara's picnic, cut the dancing, and arrived in time to see the new ballet. By the bye, Rosine is a splendid thing in danseuses."

"You were speaking of Bentham—weren't you?" interrupted Guy.

"Yes, or rather of you. He told me, when he last saw you, you were carrying a fair damsel in your arms—she had fainted or gone into hysterics, or something, when you were alone with her on the water. Quite a romance—wasn't it? Won't you give us the full, true, and particular account of the whole affair? and to begin with, who was she?" said Bertie, still watching Celia.

She had turned and was looking at Guy, as if she waited for his answer.

"One whom I don't choose should become the subject of your jests," he said with marked coldness and severity.

"*Pardon,*" sneered Bertie. "I did not know it was a tender subject."

All the while his eyes were fixed with the same malicious intentness on Celia's face; but she knew that he was watching her, and she was too perfect an actress to lose command of her features. The smile never left her lips, the light never faded from her eyes, the fair, proud face that was revealed by the fitful glare of the street-lamps was just as calm, and gay, and brilliant as ever; but as she read in Guy's face, or thought she read, some trace of the feeling that he had for another woman, she shivered from head to foot.

Guy looked down at her.

"You are cold—won't you come in?"

She drew her delicate laces over her bare white shoulders.

"Only a sudden chill. Your English summer days are treacherous—as yourselves."

"Not so treacherous as Italian eyes and Italian skies, that charm us while they slay us. Who, revelling in the glory of your radiant summer, dreams of malaria? who, looking into deep, passionate eyes, thinks of danger?"

"I think I would rather be burnt than frozen. Is it not better to be passionate than cold?" she answered him, her great eyes lighting up with a sudden fire.

There was a moment's pause, for Guy, lost in a reverie over the strange contradictions of the nature of this woman, whom

men called cold, did not speak. Then she turned to Bertie, who had left the balcony, and now returned with a soft white shawl, and thanked him as he wrapped it over her shoulders, with a radiant smile, which almost dissipated the gloom which had fallen over his face.

"You are always thoughtful, Bertie," she said in a low, caressing voice.

"That wasn't my old character, was it, Guy? He and I were always like the good and naughty boys in the story-books. Ever since I was in short frocks, he has been held up to me as a model of all I ought to be."

"I always liked the naughty boys the best," said Celia; "the good ones were so oppressive."

"But the naughty ones always came to grief—were hanged or eaten up by lions or something. I suppose *I* shall. I wonder who'd care?"

Both his companions looked at him as he spoke. Guy, who was leaning against the stonework of the house, fixed his eyes on him with a strange yearning wistfulness, and Celia raised hers with a glance which said as plainly as any words, "You know I should."

Bertie spoke again presently in his usual gay way. His spirits, always variable, seemed suddenly heightened, his depression all gone.

"Though you abuse our climate, *bella donna*," he said, lightly, "this weather appears to me divine. It is a sin and a shame to waste such an evening as this in the streets of London. How awfully nice it would be on the water at Richmond."

"Yes, it was very pleasant on the water to-day," said Guy, dreamily.

Celia darted a swift glance at him.

"I should like to go to some of those places, but I am a slave," she said pettishly.

"Throw over the theatre, and let me drive you down to Richmond to-morrow; it is to be the first appearance of our

new team. "We will dine at the Star and Garter," said Bertie, eagerly.

She shook her head.

"Isn't it a rather risky thing to drive a lady behind an untried team?" said Guy almost abruptly, waking up from the reverie into which he had fallen.

"I said it was the first appearance of these horses. We have of course tried them before," answered Bertie, quietly. "They are some Leath and I picked up. Very good, quiet sort of cattle, trained to the Park and that kind of thing, but not bad ones to drive."

If Guy had wished to prevent Celia from driving down to Richmond with Bertie, he should have been wiser than to oppose the scheme; for in the mood that she was then in, his opposition was the only thing needed to make her consent.

The idea having once entered Bertie's head, he was wild to carry it out, and overcame all her objections; even consented to the presence of the sheep-dog, and to the party being increased to ten people—all irreproachable and desirable in their different ways, though he would willingly have dispensed with their company on this occasion—and the thing was arranged.

"It cannot be to-morrow—say the day after: I must make arrangements with Mr. Davison. Of course he'll make a fuss, but I will manage him," said Celia.

"Then I will ask the other people. Guy, you will be one, of course—that is *bien entendu*," said Bertie, as leaving the balcony, they entered the room where Mrs. Robarts, nodding over her lace-work, reigned in dignified solitude.

"No, thank you, Bertie, I cannot come."

"Nonsense, Guy—you must," cried Bertie, in universal good humor with all the world. "We cannot do without you."

A cloud fell over Celia's face when she heard Guy was not coming, and for a moment her anger melted.

"Do come," she said in a low voice, as she held his hand, when he was saying "Good-by."

"Don't ask me," he said; "I can't; Bertie, are you going my way? if so, we can walk together."

"Yes, in a moment."

Guy left the room, and paused on the staircase to light a cigarette. Bertie lingered behind.

"Make your brother come; it will look better for you—and me. He is so much older, you know," whispered Celia; "and he will take all the trouble while we can—enjoy ourselves."

The dangerous tenderness of her manner completely disarmed all Bertie's suspicions; the coupling of her own name with his intoxicated him with hope; the soft emphasis which she had laid on the last words deluded him with the idea that she was anticipating the enjoyment of being alone with him, and only desired Guy's presence that they—he and she—might be more free to enjoy themselves. What wonder that he felt as if he would have promised anything and everything she could ask, and completely forgot his previous jealousy of his brother.

Meanwhile Guy, waiting for him, had repented of the momentary anger which had made him refuse to be one of the projected party.

Coming straight from sweet, pale-faced Kitty to this woman, whose very beauty was almost repulsive to him when he contrasted it with the purity and tenderness of the little English maiden, he had found it impossible to appear the same as he had appeared to Celia on the night of the supper-party. Brilliant as she was, there was something *bizarre* and strange about her which repelled him, and on this night he had not been able to make his manner to her anything but cold and politely distant, while she, stung by the alteration in him, haunted by an instinctive jealousy of this unknown woman, who had power to make Guy's eyes darken with sudden wrath because she had been made the subject of a jest, had repaid him coldness for coldness, and kept all her softness for Bertie, even practised her dangerous witcheries upon him under Guy's very eyes: till he, disgusted, refused to have any part in an excursion

which could only entangle his brother more inextricably in her power.

But now, as he stood alone, he repented his impatience. What mattered it whether this woman disgusted or pleased him? On the night of the supper-party he had believed, fully believed, that Celia loved him, and he had resolved that the power which chance had placed in his hands should, failing all other means, be used to save his brother.

Sadly, remorsefully enough, he had come to this resolution ; but how had he carried it out?

He who called himself brave, and had sworn that he would be faithful to his vow at any cost, had shirked his duty ; and because his own heart was sore with grief, had hidden himself away out of sight, neglecting to follow up the advantage he had gained over the woman who, by a strange fate, had become his adversary in this mortal combat. More than that, he had been impatient and wounded her—driven her, as it were, into Bertie's arms. How bitterly he accused himself and condemned his own weakness ; how firmly he resolved that no personal feeling should again make him shrink from the part which he must play in this life drama.

In the midst of these reflections, Bertie, full of gayety and wild with a reckless excitement he could not hide, dashed down the stairs and joined him, and before they separated it had been arranged that Guy should make one of the projected Richmond party.

It was a brilliant July day ; the sun seemed never weary of shining in the cloudless sky, and shone unceasingly on the just and on the unjust, on the happy and on the sorrowful—on the rich, finely clothed, luxurious pleasure-seekers—on the poor, half-starved, meagre toilers, who hustled each other, and lived so close to each other, and yet were as far apart as the heavens are from the earth, in the strange *mêlée* of London life.

Kitty Lorton, sitting on the back seat of a carriage drawn up outside a shop in Knightsbridge, waiting patiently while

Mrs. Hoare made her innumerable purchases, for the first time really enjoyed a glimpse of the fashionable world. She still felt that she was a very small and insignificant atom in it, but she was a happier atom than she had been, and not so much inclined to envy the others.

They had made much of her, and petted her, since her accident, and she liked that; and moreover while she had been lying on the sofa that morning, Guy Lawrence had come in and paid them a visit, and he had spoken to her kindly, almost tenderly. A small thing to make her happy, perhaps, but it was only such a little while ago that, in her loneliness and desolation, she had felt that she was man-forgotten, almost God-forgotten, and now that she began to believe that there was still some one in the world who loved her, it seemed to her that she could scarcely be glad or grateful enough; and though she would not confess it to herself, she had some secret source of happiness, some hidden hope, that tinged all things with a new brightness, which, though she did her best to overcome it and keep it down, would surge up and fill her with a strange glad tumult, and a vague sense of a happiness she could not repress.

As they drove through the Park she could almost have cried out and clapped her hands, in her childish enjoyment of the gayety and novelty of the scene; but a timely remembrance of the gravity and decorum befitting a governess kept her quiet, and she sat very still, watching everything with bright, sparkling eyes, and a little smile hovering round her lips.

She was almost glad when the carriage drew up before the shop, and Mrs. Hoare and Lily Ransford went in and left her sitting there alone. She did not care how long she waited. She liked to watch the crowds of gay carriages whirling past her, the never-ceasing stream of happy, busy people.

Poor little Kitty! This bright, transient gleam of happiness was destined to be crushed out very quickly. Even as she sat there smiling and light-hearted, the evil fate that was to take the sunshine out of her life forever, was coming towards her.

A drag, with four bright-colored bays with glittering, clinking harness, a crowd of gayly-dressed people on the roof, and a man in a light overcoat with a cigarette in his mouth, driving the spirited quartette with the easy nonchalance of a practised whip.

"Oh, what a beautiful woman!" thought Kitty, her attention attracted by the most conspicuous figure of all the group—a woman who sat on the box-seat.

She was beautiful indeed. She sat on her lofty throne like a queen; one hand carelessly dangled the little lace-covered toy she called a parasol, down by her side; and her face, exposed to the full glare of the afternoon sun, dazzled the girl who looked at her for the first time, by its radiance; the other hand was laid half-caressingly on the arm of the man who was driving, and she was looking up at him appealingly. His head was bent down so close to hers that for a moment Kitty did not see his face; but they came nearer, and she started so violently that she nearly jumped off her seat, her fingers clinched themselves unconsciously together, and her heart seemed to surge up into her throat and suffocate her. Could it be? Ay, there couldn't be much doubt about it. The man with the dark face, and deep-set eyes fixed so intently on the fair face that was so close to his own, that he never even saw her—the girl whom he had tried to delude with his false love-making, was—Guy Lawrence!

They passed like a flash of light; she never even saw that Bertie was sitting close behind, and they neither of them saw her; and when they had gone she sat cowering and shaking under the shade of her parasol, feeling absolutely dazed.

Everything seemed to be going round and round with her. The gay crowd rolled and bustled past just as it had done before; but, somehow, it had all changed, and to her dim, bewildered eyes, it seemed only like a great, moving, meaningless panorama, in which all the figures were blurred and indistinct.

Nothing was plain to her but the fact that she had seen Guy Lawrence, as he had never intended her to see him, and by

chance, by accident, had discovered a new phase of the treachery whereof he was capable. Blind jealousy—instinct—whatever you please to call it—convinced her that he was false to the love he had professed to feel for her. Only a fortnight ago he had poured out protestations of love to her. Had this other woman—this radiant, glorious creature already taken her place, and won the heart she had refused? or had he, who had deceived her once, poor trusting child, only been trying to deceive her again, when he would have made her believe in his love? Only that very morning he had looked and spoken to her—ah! she would not think of it. She dug her small fingers into the palms of her hands and bit her lip at the mere remembrance of it.

Did there ever exist a girl who would not have been rather amazed and very jealous at beholding the man whom she imagined to be her own lover, under the circumstances that Kitty Lorton beheld Guy Lawrence? And Kitty was unversed in the ways of the world, so the bare facts that she had seen with her own eyes seemed to her very conclusive; more so than they would have seemed to another, better skilled in the knowledge of mankind.

By a violent effort she mastered her agitation, and tried to appear the same as usual when Mrs. Hoare and her sister came back to the carriage; but she had a terrible struggle to keep up and answer their questions, and she felt as if the change in her must be visible to them: her mind was in such confusion that the few observations she was called upon to make were made terribly *à tort et à travers*.

They drove on into the Park, and drew up by the rails under the shade of the trees. Very soon two or three men collected round the carriage to gossip with its pretty occupants; and Kitty sat silently on her back seat, listlessly unconscious of all that was passing around her.

"Saw one of your cousins just now, as I came into the Park, Miss Ransford," said a tall, soldier-like man, leaning on the carriage door. "He was on a drag—his own, I think."

Kitty's attention was instantly arrested, and she listened eagerly, almost breathlessly.

"By the bye, is there any truth in the report that he is going to marry that actress?"

"We never listen to reports, Colonel Temple," put in Mrs. Hoare, rather hurriedly, before her sister could answer—for she knew—what Kitty, poor, miserable Kitty, did not know—that this man was speaking of Bertie. The rumor had already reached her ears in some vague form, and she was anxious it should not be repeated.

"Oh! it is only a report, is it? I began to think there must be something in it, as he's always about with her. Speak of actresses, what do you think of Rosine?"

And then they drifted off into other themes, and not a word more reached the girl who was listening with a death-like chill at her heart and a faint numb feeling creeping over her, as if her pulses had suddenly stopped.

In after times, when Kitty tried to recall that scene, she could never remember all that she felt and suffered. She was stunned with the sudden weight of misery that had fallen on her. She had a dim remembrance of kind faces bending over her, of kind voices asking "if she felt ill—she looked white and tired"—of trying to make some excuse—of being driven home, and feeling sick and faint when she tried to walk—of being half-carried upstairs and laid on her bed, and of lying there alone, and coming gradually back to the consciousness of all she had heard.

And as thought and memory crept back to her, they brought with them no violent paroxysm of grief; a sort of dull, apathetic misery seemed to have fallen on her, numbing heart and brain. She lay there looking dreamily before her; and her great eyes, full of dumb sorrow, seemed to be gazing onwards into the miserable, hopeless blank of life that lay stretched out before her. She did not weep or moan over her troubles—she lay quite still, and suffered and felt like one whose last hope in life is extinct.


Was her sorrow disproportionate to the cause? It might

seem so, but she had been deceived once and could not trust again. She had tried to believe in Guy Lawrence's love; slowly, almost reluctantly, she had been bringing herself to credit the possibility of his truth; but her faith in him had only been a doubting, wavering faith at the best, and it had been utterly destroyed by this one blow.

It seemed so incredible, so impossible to believe, after all that had passed, that he loved her; but he had done much to convince her, and for the last few days she had been beginning to feel convinced, and to build up bright hopes for the future. Now they were all destroyed. Now she knew that he had only tried to deceive her a second time; that but for her firmness in denying that she loved him, he would again be able to laugh at her and pity her. There was one consolation left to her: she had not betrayed herself. He would never know that in saying she did not love him, she had not told the truth.

The apathy of despair gave way to an overwhelming feeling of anger, to a fiercer desire for revenge. In an agony of passion she clasped her hands and prayed for oblivion of the past, for indifference to the future; prayed—though she was little in the mood for prayer—that she might learn to forget. She had said truly that the trustfulness of past days was gone from her. She knew as she lay there, the slow hot tears trickling through the fingers that tried to hide her white face from the glaring, mocking sunshine, that all trust, all hope was gone out of her life forever, and that nothing was left to her but to suffer silently—so silently that none should ever know her misery or her foolish love.

CHAPTER XXI.

EANWHILE the gay party driving down to Richmond on Bertie Deverell's drag, went on their way unconscious of the sensation they had created.

For a short time after starting, Guy had taken the reins, Bertie being anxious for his opinion of the new team; but he soon resigned his seat and Bertie took his place, sending the horses along at a pace that speedily brought them to their destination. It was a brilliant little party that held revel in one of the rooms of the Star and Garter, overlooking the river; but fairest of the fair ones there assembled, most brilliant of the brilliant, shone the queen of the evening, the celebrated Estelle. Envied by the women, adored by the men, she was in her glory; there needed but one thing to make her triumph complete—and that one thing—did she feel that it was almost within her grasp?

Never had her glorious eyes glowed with a softer light, or her perfect face been more radiant than on this evening; but not one of her tender glances, her low-murmured speeches were for the golden-haired boy who sat on her right hand, who would willingly have laid down life and honor at her feet; they were all reserved for the grave-faced man who set no value on her favor or her love, except as a means of gaining power over her.

The task which Guy Lawrence had set himself was terribly distasteful to him. He would not have thought much of flirting and trifling with this woman, knowing her for what she was—a vain, ambitious coquette; but doing it in cold blood, for a reason and a purpose, feeling no pleasure, no warmth in the homage he tried to pay her, only miserably conscious of his own falseness to her, was repugnant to him. After all, was it not doing evil that good might come? But the good was for Bertie. He had told himself he would do anything to save his brother. He would not shirk this duty; but rather, having made up his mind that it was to be done, would do it effectually.

Some of the brilliance and gayety of former days seemed to come back to him as the hours wore on. He was in reality more light-hearted than he had been for a long time, for he had seen Kitty that day—only seen her in her cousin's presence, lying pale and quiet on a sofa—but it had seemed to him, though she had scarcely spoken, there had been a tenderness in her manner which almost justified him in hoping to win back her love, and he felt that it was easier to be gay now the future was not quite so dark.

Moreover he was a man, and not above the weaknesses of mankind. What man, looking down on the glorious beauty by his side, and reading the tenderness for himself in her passionate southern eyes, would feel for long that it was a hard matter to simulate tenderness or to feel a real attraction to so lovely a woman? Guy warmed to his task. "*La Belle Sorcière*" tried her subtlest witcheries upon him, and wove her spells around him, till for the moment he almost forgot the unreality of his love-making and remembered only her beauty; while she, radiant with hope, softened by love, had never been so really bewitching.

For a while the woman was predominant over the actress: she forgot her policy, her desire to keep in with everybody, and yielded herself to the enchantment of the moment.

"We must drink one toast," said Bertie, raising a glass of sparkling hock—he had already taken far more than was good for him, and his face was flushed, his eyes were sparkling with an unnatural lustre. "To Love—and the Queen of Love," he added in a whisper meant to be audible only to her, as he gazed down on the woman whom he worshipped with all the passionate warmth of his nature.

"It is a fit wine in which to drink such a toast," said Guy, with a curl of his lip, as he held his glass to the light and watched the bubbles rise to the surface; "so sparkling, effervescent, and tempting at first, *après* so flat, stale, and insipid."

"Let us drink it while it is still sparkling, then," said Celia,

raising the glass to her lips, and looking a living embodiment of the poem, "Drink to me only with thine eyes."

"Come into the garden, Celia," whispered Bertie, drawing her hand into his arm, when they had all risen from the table and were standing in groups, looking out into the twilight.

She drew her hand away with a look of intense weariness.

"No, I will stay here," she answered, throwing herself on a low couch, close to an open window.

Bertie, excited with wine, scarcely noted for a moment the coldness of her manner; but Guy, standing a little way off, bit his lip with anger to think that any woman should dare to treat his brother so.

"You won't come with me, Celia? You forget that you promised—"

Celia looked up with a passion in her face which, for some reason, she no longer cared to control. Did she think that the other man's love was so nearly her own that she could afford to let this one go?

"I have made no promise to you—of any sort," she said, with bitter emphasis; "and if I had," she added with a light laugh, "are you so deluded, *mon ami*, as to trust to women's promises?"

"I was a fool to trust to yours," he said, turning from her with a fierce pain in his heart—and he went out into the darkness alone, with the sound of her mocking laughter still ringing in his ears.

Guy looked after him very sorrowfully. The momentary attraction that he had felt for Celia vanished; he felt, as he stood there, that he hated her—not only on account of her cruelty, but because of her he was obliged to be false to himself. But he was glad that she herself had shown Bertie how little she loved him. Surely now it would not be so hard to make him believe the truth? Painful as it was to Guy to see him suffer, he tried to rejoice at that which he thought must be for his brother's ultimate good. It was the old story of the disease and its remedy—the sharper the knife the more effec-

tive the cure. But it was hard on him, very hard, that it should be his hand that must guide the knife; that he, who would have sacrificed anything for Bertie, must seem so false, as if he were supplanting him in the affections of the very woman against whom he had warned him. Guy groaned to himself when he reflected how he must appear in Bertie's eyes—how false, how dishonorable. He who had listened to the boy's acknowledgment of his fatal passion and so utterly condemned it, was winning away the love on which he had set his heart, under his very eyes. It would not do to think of it—it would drive him mad. Let Celia show Bertie, once for all, how little she cared for him; and then, if he were saved, what mattered the rest? He, Guy Lawrence, could bear to be misjudged as he had been all his life. What mattered a little more or a little less?

One by one—or rather two by two—the others had left the room, and Celia and Guy were alone together. He stood in the bright light, she lay in the shadow; he seemed to be looking at some photographs, and she seemed to be looking out into the twilight, across the quiet water.

Then she turned and looked at him, inviting him with her eyes to come and sit by her side. He came slowly and stood near her, but something of the anger that was in his heart showed itself in his face.

"Day-dreams, Celia?" he said at length. "What are you thinking of? Meditating fresh triumphs, or contemplating past conquests? How insatiable you are: a kind of modern Juggernaut that men fall down and worship, only to be maimed and crushed and cast aside. I'm not sure the heathens didn't have the best of it, after all: they died for their idol and the gods were appeased; but your victims live and groan in agony, while you—"

"Guy—" She spoke in so sad a tone, her voice was so reproachful, that he instinctively stopped in the midst of his irony. "Am I so worthless? It is only just, perhaps, that you should despise me—"

"Despise you, Celia?" There was a tinge of contempt in his tone—he had not forgotten her manner to Bertie. "One doesn't despise now, it's too *prononcé*—that's the term, isn't it?—*anglicé*, honest—it's bad style, as Bertie says; and yet it's the wisest thing to do sometimes—I wish *he* thought so."

After a short pause. "How beautiful it is here," murmured Celia, not wishing to pursue the topic they had drifted into. "See the soft light the moon throws over those distant trees; see how the river flows beneath, like liquid silver."

"Almost as grand as the 'Haunt of the Moonbeams' in a pantomime—isn't it? I can almost imagine 'La Belle Sorcière' rising from that island—where the public-house stands—to the accompaniment of mysterious music and the lime-light."

"Can you never think of me, never picture me to yourself except as an actress, with all the adjuncts of my profession? Is it so impossible for you to drop my trade for a minute?" she said, impatiently, taking offence at his tone more than his words.

"Wasn't it your sole aim, your sole ambition, to make yourself one?"

There was a moment's silence. Celia sat gazing dreamily out into the twilight, with an unusual wistfulness in her eyes. "I wonder I cared so much about it," she said, in a very low voice, as if to herself; "it seems such a poor triumph since—since—"

Guy's face softened; he bent down to catch the last words.

"Since when, Celia?"

But she did not answer him. He sat down on the sofa and looked intently at her, but not so sternly as he had done a few minutes before.

"I wish you did think it a poor triumph, Celia; I wish you did think less of ambition, and more of the things which other women hold dear."

She questioned him with her eyes, and he went on.

"I am speaking of women who maybe are not so clever or so beautiful as you; but other hopes, other fears, fill up their

lives—and I think it is right they should. I think it is better that in a woman's life ambition should be subordinate to love."

"Why do you wish that? what good would it do me if it were so—if I were foolish enough to love any one?" she asked, after a moment's pause, with a tremor in her voice.

She listened so eagerly for his answer, as if she hungered for his words. It seemed to her as if she was so near to the attainment of her wildest desire, she scarcely dared breathe lest she should break the spell.

"It would teach you to feel more for those who love you; you'd know a little better what you are doing when you trifle with a thing so sadly, terribly real; the aching of your own heart might teach you to spare others."

Guy was looking out into the twilight at two dark figures that passed by on the terrace, and he did not see the bitter disappointment that darkened her face. She did not speak for a moment, for she felt that she could not trust her voice; but she followed his glance, and knew that when he had spoken of love, he had not been thinking of himself, but of Bertie.

But she did not betray herself. She felt that the fact of Guy's speaking on this subject at all was one step in the right direction, and she was not a woman to be easily frustrated, or to let a small thing turn her from her purpose. She only set herself the more resolutely to overcome all difficulties by the sheer force of her will. Time and opportunity seemed in her favor, and she did not let slip any advantage.

"You preach mercy who never show it, and teach love who have never felt it," she said, looking straight up into his eyes. Then laying her white hand caressingly on his arm, "Why are you so hard on me, Guy?"

He took her hand and held it in his.

"Am I hard on you, Celia?" he said, sadly. "Perhaps I am; it is because I think too much—care too much—"

"Lawrence, are you ready to go? You said you wanted to be in town early, so I've ordered my brougham—it's just ten!"

Celia and Guy both turned round quickly.

It was Bentham who had spoken, but with such unusual abruptness that Guy scarcely recognized the voice, until he looked up and saw him standing there on the terrace, arm-in-arm with Bertie. He knew then how the bright light in the room had revealed their figures—his and hers—and shown them so clearly as they sat there, hand in hand, to the two friends who stood out in the twilight watching them. He could not see their faces, but he knew, if he could, what scorn and reproach he might have read there. For the first time in his life he felt what it was to be despised, and the humiliation was almost too great for him to bear.

He knew that he, Guy Lawrence, had been mentally tried by those two men, and found guilty of treachery—of dishonor. By Bentham, who, spite of his affectation, was a man whose opinion was not to be despised, because he himself was of spotless honor and integrity; and by Bertie. Oh, was it not hard that he should seem to him this thing which he was not; that in Bertie's eyes he should appear treacherous and dishonorable?

Guy rose and turned to speak to Celia.

"Good-by, Celia," he said hurriedly, "I'm due in town at eleven, and Bentham has promised to drive me."

They could not see his face, but one of them fancied he could note a momentary hesitation in his voice.

"I must go, too," she said; and then, as they joined the others, she whispered, "Wait to see us off."

Celia was an autocrat whose command Bertie, incensed though he was, had not the courage to disobey; so he went to order the drag while the other stray members of the party were collected and disinterred from the various retreats whither they had betaken themselves.

"You'll come on the drag, as we all start together, won't you, Bentham?" said Bertie, as they stood on the steps. "You haven't ridden behind my team yet. Guy can have the brougham to himself, and go straight to his destination, wherever that may be. You'll be in town quite as soon."

Bentham, to whom Guy's conduct was quite inexplicable, was glad enough to escape a tête-à-tête drive with him; so he closed with Bertie's offer, and turning to Guy explained that the brougham in which he had come down, being too late for the drag, was at his disposal. But Guy lingered. He was anxious to get away, but he would not go at any man's bidding, and so he waited till the drag was brought to the door. A difficult matter to accomplish, for the horses, which did not at any time merit Bertie's description of "good, quiet sort of cattle," coming fresh from the stable and unlimited feeds of corn, were very restive; and the near-side leader reared and plunged in a way that made some of the more nervous among the women cry out and turn pale with alarm.

Bertie, taking the reins in one hand, settled himself on the box.

"Who will venture first?" he said, with a smile, holding out the other.

There was a moment's silence, and then Adèle Trébillon sprang forward with a light laugh.

"*Mon Dieu*, but you are all cowards," she said, as she jumped up the steps as airily as if she were ascending a mountain-pass in a *ballet d'action*.

One by one they followed, till Bentham and Celia were the only ones who remained below; Bentham held out his hand to assist her up the steps, and Bertie turned and looked at her as he arranged the cushions on the seat by his side. His anger was almost obliterated, in the pleasurable anticipation of the drive, and he smiled as he waited for her.

But Celia drew back.

"No, I cannot go, I am afraid," she said resolutely; but her eyes dropped and even she quailed before the sudden fury her words caused. For a moment Bertie could not speak: this was the last drop in the cup of bitterness which she had given him to drink throughout the evening, the last straw which broke down all his patience and made self-restraint no longer possible.

"Wouldn't it be better to say you *won't* come—better to tell the truth for once?" he gasped out.

Celia looked up into the white face, quivering with rage, and laughed.

"*Eh bien!* put it so, if you like; say I will not come. Life has not quite lost its charm for me, and I don't mean to throw it away to please you."

"Pray don't throw away anything on my account—even your manœuvring to go with him," cried Bertie, scarcely knowing what he said, and pointing with his whip to Guy, "is quite wasted. You'd scarcely take the trouble if you knew—"

"For God's sake, Bertie, mind what you're about," cried Bentham, springing aside—for in his anger he had tightened and jerked the reins till the horses were almost beyond the control of the men who stood at their heads.

Bertie's voice was drowned in the noise of their restless feet, the clanking of the harness, and the entreaties and cries of alarm among those of his guests who were already seated on the drag; and none of them heard anything more of what he said.

Perhaps it was as well they did not. There is no greater leveller than unrestrained passion, no greater refutation of the maxim, "*Noblesse oblige.*" Dukes and dustmen, duchesses and fish-women, sink to a common level under the influence of unrestrained anger; and then rank, nobility, and even manhood, are apt to be forgotten. Bertie Deverell, who had never practised the smallest self-control, would at that moment have said anything and everything that came to his mind.

"You are welcome to the use of my brougham," said Bentham, turning in the midst of the confusion to Celia, who stood calmly watching her own work. "Lawrence will escort you to town," and then without waiting for a reply, he sprang up on to the box-seat by Bertie's side.

In obedience to a sign from him, the grooms left the horses' heads, and Bertie tried to start them; but, fretted and chafed by the delay, they required more cool and skilful management

... snouted Bertie, white with fury.

"Not till you give the reins to Bentham; state to drive."

"Then by G—, I'll make you!" and raising brought it down with all his force on Guy's arm.

With a stifled cry, Guy let go his hold, and brother, with his arm upraised, as if he would have from his seat—then he let it fall, and turned away word.

Another lash of the whip, a few more plunges, away—away at a mad pace—and not one backward Bertie at the man, who, for the first time in his insulted—and by his own brother.

"Are you hurt!" murmured Celia, looking with great pitiful eyes. "Was it an accident?"

"Yes," answered Guy—"God forgive me the lie—" "It wasn't the whip that hurt me; I broke it and I've strained it a little, but it's nothing really get into the brougham and wait for me? I'll presently."

For a moment Celia hesitated. She thought to leave her because he was suffering.

during—though it was true that in hanging on to the horse's head he had severely strained the arm which had never quite recovered the accident at Aylesbury—but because he felt that he must be a few minutes by himself before he could seem the same as usual. He went into the room where they had dined—now deserted—and, throwing himself on a couch, turned his face away from the light, to catch the cool evening breeze. He remained there motionless for some little while, and then he rose slowly, and, going to the light, gazed long and steadfastly at the livid blue line which lay all across his hand and wrist. Once he would have looked at the mark of such a blow in a terrible tumult of anger and shame, that any man—even though he was his brother—should have dared to lift his hand against him, with a fierce desire for any vengeance which could wipe out the stigma of such an insult. But slowly, yet surely, Guy Lawrence was learning the great lesson of his life—to endure; and his face, though it looked very white under the glare of the lamps, bore no traces of anger: only of a sorrow too great, a trouble too deep, for any words.

Rolling along through the quiet night, these two, whose lives and destinies were so inextricably and strangely interwoven, sat for a while, side by side, almost in silence.

The one was thinking—thinking deeply and bitterly of all that had passed between himself and his brother; the other was feeling—feeling that she was alone with the man she loved, and that perhaps on this hour depended all the happiness of her future life.

The silence was becoming almost oppressive. Celia, sitting by Guy's side, seeing him so absorbed in thought, so unconscious of her presence, began to feel as if she would suffocate if it continued much longer: but her heart was so full of one thing, she could not bring her lips to utter any vague common-places. At last she touched his arm lightly with her hand, as if she were arousing him from sleep.

"Guy, I would give a good deal to know your thoughts—won't you trust me with them?"

"You wouldn't care to have them," he answered sadly.

"They seem very interesting—more interesting than I. You haven't spoken to me for a quarter of an hour."

"They couldn't be more interesting than you—and they were of you, partly."

"Of me?"—with a bright flush, and a pretty pretence of surprise, that made Guy smile for a moment—only for a moment—and then his face grew very grave again.

"Celia," he said, after a short silence, "I wonder if I could trust you with my thoughts? I wonder if it would be better if I were to tell you all—and leave it in your hands. Will you listen to me?"

She did not speak, but her eyes answered him with an intensity of expression he had not expected. He was too much absorbed in his own train of thought to guess that she had given another meaning to his words than that which he had intended them to convey.

"Among other things," he continued, "my thoughts have been wandering back to a long time past—perhaps forgotten by you—when you, because you fancied I had some small claim on your gratitude, on your remembrance, said you would do anything you could to please me—for my sake. Forgive me for reminding you of it—I feel it is wrong, ungenerous—but I want to establish a claim on your mercy, your forbearance; and I have no other."

"You need none. Ask me only to do anything for your sake, and I will do it; there is not anything I will not do—for you."

"And the favor I would ask you seems such an easy one for you to grant; and yet, I fear—Celia," he went on very earnestly, "you have a hundred lovers, and I only ask you to give up one, and one that you do not care for. You know how much Bertie loves you, you know better than I can tell you. If I were speaking to another woman it might be unwise of me to teach her the extent of her power, but you are perfectly well aware how madly he loves you, how absolutely and

entirely he is your slave. You say you will do anything to please me, and this is all I ask you: to spare him, to save him from the misery that is in store for him; as far as you can."

"Is it so terrible a thing to love me?" she interrupted in a harsh voice. Her face had changed suddenly; a gray shadow seemed to have fallen over it, and her eyes blazed as she turned upon him. "Am I a pariah, an outcast, a thing to be hated and dreaded, that you ask me to save your brother from myself as I would from the pestilence?"

"Celia, here me one moment. I only ask you to tell him the truth—you don't love him. You know you don't: I have read in your face, I have seen in your manner, that you scorn and despise him; and yet somehow—Heaven knows how—you have managed to delude him into the belief that you return his love. I only beg you, implore you, to open his eyes yourself; for you, only you, can do it."

"Judge for yourself; you have seen us together. Is it my fault or his if he thinks that I love him?"

"You must have encouraged him. Bertie's not a fool; he wouldn't hang on to a vain hope. Celia, you may not have promised anything—I don't suppose you have; you are not a woman to bind yourself down to any vows; but you've led him to believe that in the end you will reward him by marrying him; he endures your caprices, he tries to overcome his jealousy at your attentions to others, because he believes—you have led him to believe—that your real love is for him. For pity's sake don't quibble over a thing that is life or death to him, though it may be sport to you. I ask you to tell him that you don't love him; to set him free once for all. Have some pity, some womanly pity, on him. He is only a mere boy; he loves you to his ruin, his misery. What will his life be worth when you cast him off—as I suppose you will, sooner or later?"

"You are very wise. How do you know that I do not intend to marry him?"

Guy thought to himself that that was what he dreaded more than anything else, but he could not tell her so.

"Give me the assurance that you love him, and I will try to be content—try to believe that he will be happy, if you do; but," he added with sudden passion, fixing his eyes on her face, "you do not—I know you do not. You cannot deceive me, and you have no right to deceive him; I will not let you."

She did not answer him. She turned away her head, and gazed out into the darkness.

Guy caught her hand.

"Celia, forgive me if I have spoken too strongly, and seemed harsh. You can't know all I feel on this subject. He is my charge, and he has no one else to care for him but me. Dear Celia, won't you keep your promise, and do this thing for my sake? I saved your life once. I ask you now to give me his."

She tore away her hand and burst into a sudden passion of tears.

"You have no right to ask me—I won't do it: he at least loves me, and I won't cast away his love or do anything at your bidding. Why should I care to please you—you, who—" She broke off, and burying her face in her hands, as if to smother the words that came to her lips, rocked herself to and fro.

"What have I done, Celia—what have I done?" said Guy, trying to draw away her hands.

"You are cruel—cruel—more cruel than I." The words were half stifled, scarcely articulate, but Guy heard them and was silent.

For he knew then what she meant; knew that she, half consciously, half unconsciously, accused him of having gained her love. He dared not speak; the remembrance of Kitty Lorton, the possibility that she might still love him, sealed his lips. He could not a second time endanger her happiness and his own.

And so they drove in silence to the house in Curzon Street.

"Celia, good-by: don't be angry with me. I had no right to ask you to do anything. Will you forgive me?"

She only pressed his hand, she did not speak, and he watched her until the door closed upon her, and then turned away with a heavy heart.

In vain he asked himself, when he found himself alone, whether he had done wisely in speaking to her on this subject or not. It had been impossible for him to say all that was in his mind; he could not insult her by asking her to save Bertie from a marriage with herself—he could only use the other plea, that she did not love him, and it was therefore wrong and cruel to delude him with the idea that she did. He had been able to say so little, that he really felt, after all, perhaps it would have been better to have held his peace and trusted to time and the change in Celia's manner towards Bertie to effect his cure. But would he ever be cured? Would not the slightest encouragement, the least return of Celia's warmth, rekindle the flame of his love and make it blaze anew? And yet, again, wilful, imperious, fickle as this woman was, who could tell but that the toy once cast aside would be abandoned, uncared for, and forgotten?

And so, bewildered by conflicting thoughts, oppressed by a sadness he could not overcome, Guy gave up his intention of going elsewhere, and wandered wearily homewards.

CHAPTER XXII.



STELLE, the famous actress, was undoubtedly a very beautiful woman.

En grande tenue, rustling in silks and satins, shrouded in laces, and gleaming with jewels, she was magnifi-

cent; she took the world by storm and compelled admiration; but she should have been seen *en déshabille* to be seen to perfection. Then her beauty lost something of its hardness, its self-assertive grandeur, and was softer and more womanly. See her in her dressing-room the night after the Richmond dinner, her costly attire flung aside, a soft white wrapper half-shrouding, half-revealing, her perfect form; her hair unbound, hanging like a dusky cloud over her shoulders, and falling in heavy waving masses down to her waist, touched here and there with strange glints of light where it caught the reflection of the candles; two gleaming white arms resting on the dressing-table and supporting a pale face, with bright, ever-restless eyes, full of a troubled, passion-stirred eagerness.

Some one said once that Estelle had a face that could express all the emotions which she did not feel, and could hide all those that she did feel; but Estelle in public and Estelle in private, were two different beings. For a while, she could drop her assumed character and be herself; for a while, she could forget the ambitious rôle she had taken upon herself in the great drama that is forever being played on the world's stage; for a while, she could give over the ceaseless struggle to be great, and be only a woman, with an aching heart.

She loved Guy Lawrence; and in her wounded pride and love, suffered more than many a better woman. There was nothing mean or small about her nature, though it may have been a bad one. She had immense powers of endurance, of concentrating all her thoughts, all her will, upon one object until she attained it; and she had equal powers of loving and hating.

She loved Guy Lawrence with an intensity that was part of her character, and she suffered accordingly.

Long ago she had, in the consciousness of her own strength of will, set herself above the weaknesses of other women. She had said that because no one loved her or cared what became of her, she would make her life for herself, she would live for her ambition. She had told Guy Lawrence so that summer

day which seemed so long ago, and there had come to her no prevision of a time when ambition, desire for admiration, for wealth and fame, all would be merged in one absorbing feeling; of a time when even her triumph would have lost its sweetness in the never-ceasing longing for the one thing she could not gain—his love.

This love had come upon her against her will. Slowly, reluctantly, she yielded herself to it. Her nature, strong and hard and self-reliant, unconsciously acknowledged the superiority of his—"*elle avait trouvée son maître.*" His very sternness and harshness to her compelled her homage. She was not capable of loving a man for whom she had no fear and for whom she felt a spark of pity. The tenderness and compassion which is the very germ of love in some womanly hearts, had no place in hers. Her love was like herself—violent and stormy and passionate. Even his indifference added flame to it, for opposition only galled her into the more intense striving after the thing which she desired. Her creed was, that a woman with a strong will could do anything; and yet even with such beauty as hers she had not been able to win his love.

Baffled and thwarted she acknowledged herself to be that night, as she leaned her face on her hands and thought over all that had passed. She set her teeth and clinched her fingers in her hair as she thought how she had deluded herself with hope, how she had believed that she was so near to the attainment of her desire, when in reality she had been so far from it. Yet she was not daunted. Unscrupulous, unfettered by the reticence and modesty which deter most women from striving to gain a man's love—from the fear that such striving may become apparent—with a cool brain, a steady judgment, and the power of seeming that which she was not, there were still many moves she could make in this dangerous game which she had set herself to play, and with such a combination of forces it would be strange if she did not win.

She might not be able to gain his love at first, for love is a thing that cannot be forced, but she vowed that she would use

every means in her power, fair or foul, to bind him to her so firmly that he would not be able to leave her; and then, surely, love would follow. She raised her head and looked at the reflection of her own beautiful face in the mirror. She knew full well the power of its seductive, sensuous loveliness; she could count out the value of each separate charm, each separate beauty, as a dealer counts out the gold with which he means to bid for the treasure on which he has set his heart; but the look changed to a fierce, vengeful stare, as if she almost hated the beauty which had failed to win the love she most desired, and her head dropped again upon her hands. "It's all no good, all no good," she sighed, "if he despises me."

And then again she sank into thought so engrossing, so deep, that the minutes flew by till they lengthened into hours, and still she sat there motionless. Her mind was wandering back to the time when she first became acquainted with Bertie Deverell. She was remembering how, knowing that he was Guy's brother, she had accorded him more freedom in seeing her than to any of the other men who sought her; how her manner to him had always been dangerously kind; how from admiring her he had come to love her passionately, devotedly, and she had drawn him on and encouraged his love, not because she had even a passing tendresse for Bertie himself, but because he was Guy's brother.

Guy had been her hero since the days of her childhood. He had been very great in her eyes, and he had not accorded her in her womanhood the admiration she had expected from him, he had angered her and opposed her wishes. The greatest glory of her success, the greatest sweetness of her triumph, had been that some day he would see it and be forced to acknowledge it. Through all the striving after it, through all the gaining of it, her one thought had been of him, and what he would think of it. And Bertie's love and homage had seemed an additional triumph to her, because she knew that Guy cared for him and thought much of him, and it was sweet to her to think that she held him so firmly in her chains.

Then her thoughts came to the time when Guy had returned from abroad, and she, seeing him, had learnt to love him in her passionate, headstrong way. She thought how he had angered her from the first, by letting her see how much he dreaded her power over Bertie, how he had goaded her into a determination not to do as he wished, not to set Bertie free from her slavery; and then again her mouth relaxed from its hard lines, her face softened as she dwelt on the remembrance of the few times when Guy had been kind to her, seemed almost to love her, till she had cared no more about Bertie's allegiance and had been rude to him and almost given him his *congé*. But this evening she had discovered the vanity of her hopes, had learnt that even when Guy had been most tender to her, his thoughts had been of Bertie—only of Bertie. She told herself bitterly that through him, the foolish boy whom she in her careless cruelty was leading on to ruin, lay her only attraction for, her only power over, the man she loved. Was it likely then that she would set him free from the spell she had thrown upon him, till she had gained her end and he was of no more use to her?

At present he was of use to her, for Guy could not be indifferent to her as long as he knew her power over his brother and feared it.

Then all at once the tension of her thoughts gave way: her fingers that were clenched in her hair relaxed their hold; her head drooped lower and lower, until her cold white face rested itself on the table, one great gasping sob came from her heaving bosom, and she clasped her hands as if in an agony of supplication to some unseen being.

"Give me his love—only his love. Take away all else, but give me only that. I will give my soul for that, if I have a soul; I would give my life, only I cannot die without him. Take everything, take everything—only give me his love."

She, destitute of religion or principle, blind to any knowledge of good or evil, appealed in her passion to some unknown Power, whose omnipotence she had never before acknowledged.

Had she, Undine-like, found her soul through her love ?

The next morning found Guy Lawrence on his way to Jermy Street.

He could scarcely have told what led him there, or what he meant to say to Bertie when he found himself in his presence. All he knew was that he could no longer bear the estrangement that was growing up between himself and his brother, and that he must end it in some way. He knew after the insult he had received it was for Bertie to make the *amende*, and for him to forgive; and for a while he had to struggle with the pride which bade him stop away and shun the presence of one who had so grievously wounded him; but then again his generosity, his love for his brother got the better of him; he reminded himself how great the provocation must have seemed in Bertie's eyes, how passionate he had always been, but then how ready to forgive and forget all wrongs. And he resolved that he would go to him, and let him see that he bore him no malice for that which had passed between them, and try to win his confidence, and bring things to a better state than they were in now.

Surely, after the experience of the previous evening, it would not be so hard to convince him of the small amount of affection that Celia bore him, to induce him to give up this misplaced love, and turn his thoughts to some worthier ambition than the winning of an actress's false smiles.

Pondering thus, Guy found himself at his destination. The door was opened by Saunders, Bertie's groom, who was waiting for orders.

"Ah, Saunders," said Guy, in recognition of the man's salute; "Mr. Bertie at home?"

"Yes, sir, but he's engaged with a gentleman, and said as he wasn't to be disturbed."

"Oh, very well. I'll wait till the gentleman has gone then. Are you all right?"

"Pretty middling, sir, thank ye, sir; a bruise or two, you know, sir, but nothing to speak about."

"Bruises! How did you get them?" asked Guy, anxiously, as if a sudden fear had occurred to him.

"Last night, sir; maybe you haven't heard, sir, as we come to grief at Richmond?"

"Good Heavens, no! What happened?—tell me!"

"Why you see, sir, when we had left the Star and Garter we came down the hill at such a pace that the ladies got frightened, and one of 'em was a goin' into 'isterics; upon which Mr. Bertie, who was a bit angry about something, I think, sir, without a word, drove straight into the station, and told 'em if they was a goin' to be foolish they'd better go home by rail. So down they all gets, except Mr. Bentham. Mr. Bertie was werry angry—"

"Never mind all that; tell me about the accident."

"I'm a coming to that now, sir. Mr. Bertie was just a turning round to come out of the station, when the near leader got frightened at a van of excursion people as was a passing and hoorrayin', and Mr. Bertie, instead of soothing him like, sir, set to and lashed at him as 'ard as he could. Well, sir, up he goes a pawing in the air, then out went his 'eels, and afore you could say Jack Robinson, swerved round, and took us agin a lamp-post; the near fore-wheel caught it, and over we all went."

"But Mr. Bertie—was he hurt much?" asked Guy, impatiently, and his face had grown very pale.

"No, sir, nothing very serious. You see, sir, we wasn't going at no pace. Hurt his arm, I think, sir. Mr. Bentham twisted his ankle a bit and cut his hand, that's all. Me and Jarvis was a gettin' down when the smash came—so you see, sir, we hadn't got werry far to fall. The wust happened to the near wheeler. A werry bad kick he got, as the young 'un was a lashing out."

Guy turned away without waiting to hear more. Ascending the stairs, he encountered a man who was descending. An over-dressed, yellow-faced, black-bearded man, with leering eyes peering out under bushy eyebrows, curly hair, a long-

drawn mouth, and a nose that proclaimed him a descendant of the house of Abraham. As Guy passed him, he stood aside with a profound obeisance, and a swift glance of scrutiny.

"So it has come to this, then?" Guy thought. "Bertie has fallen among thieves indeed. He is particularly engaged, and his friend is—Mr. Leoni. Dare say that man knows more about me, and what I'm worth, and what I'm likely to be worth at the end of a few years if I go on paying Bertie's debts, than I do myself. I shouldn't wonder if he counted all my gray hairs, my wrinkles and furrows, and made an exact mental calculation of the chances of my marrying as he passed me on the stairs."

"How are you, Bertie?" he said, entering the room, and going straight up to his brother.

Bertie, newspaper in hand, dressed in his old morning costume of black velvet, was lying back in an arm-chair, with an air of lassitude and weariness; but he started as Guy entered, and flushed crimson as he nervously took and then dropped his brother's outstretched hand.

"All right, thanks; that is, a little tired. Went into Leath's last night—didn't get home till four."

"Went into Leath's? I wonder you were fit. I heard you came to grief and hurt your arm. You shouldn't play tricks with yourself. You don't look over-strong, Bertie," said Guy, regarding him with anxious eyes.

Bertie laughed—a constrained, nervous laugh, that he meant to be careless.

"My arm's all right—only a scratch or two, or a sprain, or something. Can't think what the deuce they tied it up in this thing for; I suppose they thought it looked interesting," he said, as he saw Guy's glance fall on the violet scarf that was doing duty as a sling.

There was a moment's silence, a very awkward one, which neither of them knew how to break. Guy was thinking how strange this meeting was, after the manner in which they had parted on the previous evening; and yet how impossible it was

for him to do or say anything else. He could not fall into his brother's arms and make a grand scene of forgiveness and reconciliation, French fashion. He could only hold out his hand to him, and show by his manner that he bore no malice. And then he could tell by Bertie's looks, by his hurried, nervous manner, that he neither desired to forgive, nor to be forgiven; that he was still full of wrath and jealousy—they were only smouldering, and would, at the smallest provocation, burst out afresh—and Bertie was wondering which of his two morning visitors he would sooner have avoided.

"Saunders was waiting to see you when I came up; he seems a little knocked about."

"Why in the name of goodness hasn't he come up? I've been wanting to see him," said Bertie, ringing the bell with an impatient jerk.

"He said you were engaged with—a gentleman."

"He's a fool—doesn't half know his business," muttered Bertie; then turning to the man who answered the door, "Send Saunders up."

"He's a good servant, and a faithful one," said Guy, as the door closed.

And then when the groom came up he turned away and took up a paper, while Bertie began questioning the man in an angry, authoritative tone.

"How are the bays?"

"All right, sir, barring Beauty, and she's got a werry ugly kick that the young 'un give her when he was a-lashing out; don't know what to make of her quite, sir."

"Don't know what to make of her?" cried Bertie, petulantly; "then why the deuce don't you send for some one who does? I'm to lose a hundred-guinea horse because I've got an infernal fool for a groom! Send for Mr. Ivan, the vet., at once. Is the drag injured?"

"Yes, sir; knocked about a good deal," replied Saunders, in a humble tone.

"Get that looked to as well, then," replied Bertie, biting

his lips with anger. "And now, get out—but stop; bring the brougham round in half an hour."

Guy, hearing Bertie talk of drags, and broughams, and hundred-guinea horses, thought to himself that he should wonder how it was possible to do all this on little more than a thousand a year—for that was the sum he had allowed his brother since he had left college, in addition to the small legacy left to him by his mother—if he had not encountered that Jew money-lender on the stairs. He began to think that perhaps he ought to speak to Bertie about it, only he could not bear to mention the subject, knowing that his brother was dependent on his generosity. He was painfully conscious all the while of the way in which Bertie was speaking to Saunders, and it was a great relief to him when the man was allowed to depart.

"I'm sorry the horse is injured," he said, as the door closed, and Bertie threw himself back in his chair with a sullen frown.

"Sorry, are you? It's a pity your repentance didn't come a little sooner. I have to thank you for this and for a good deal more besides."

"I don't quite understand you."

"Don't you?" retorted Bertie, his face blazing with passion; "it's easy to understand my meaning. Do you think any horse would stand having his head pulled and dragged at as you dragged at his? Do you think any other man would stand such treatment as you bestowed on me last night? I take my oath, if it had been any one else, I'd have horsewhipped him for it. As it is—"

Bertie faltered, and the words died on his lips. His eyes had fallen on Guy's hand—on the deep blue wale that lay across it.

"As it is," said Guy, quietly, "I think it is *I* who have to forgive—not *you*. That"—with a glance at his hand—"was the first blow I have ever received and not resented—and it shall be the last. You presumed too much on the fact that I once told you I would bear anything from you; but I came here to-day determined to forget all that, not to reproach you

for it. As for your accusations, I pass over the first and the absurdity of it; the second—”

“The second! Can you speak to me of insult, can you look me in the face after your cowardly treachery? You, who came at my invitation, to try and rob me of the affections of the woman whom you know I care for, and whom you sneer at and revile behind her back? When I think how you came to me with your hypocritical cant and pretended to warn me against her, I feel as if no words were strong enough to express my abhorrence of your conduct.”

Guy paled visibly, but still he answered very quietly—

“You condemn me because you do not, cannot understand that it was for you, to show you what she is, how undeserving of your love, I did this. Bertie, you have a right to demand an explanation of me, though not in the words or the tone you have used, and I will give it you. Seeing what she was—this woman whom you love, and whom I hate, because she is trying to ruin your life—seeing how willing she was to pay attention to me for some mercenary motive of her own, I led her on, and my sole and simple reason was to show her to you in her true light as a vain, unscrupulous woman, who was willing to throw you over at a moment’s notice. If I have succeeded in this, if I have opened your eyes to the truth, I am content; even though I have forfeited all the regard I once hoped you would have for me, even though you think me dishonorable and treacherous.”

Guy sank back in his chair and shaded his face with one hand.

“Conduct worthy of a gentleman, certainly! Supposing I believed this farrago of nonsense, perhaps you’ll explain to me how you excuse yourself from the very crime of which you accuse me. If she has led *me* on to throw me over, haven’t you led *her* on, according to your own account, with the same intention?”

“She is out of the pale of my consideration when your happiness is at stake. Her heart isn’t likely to be broken; she

deserves some punishment for the way she has treated you. She may go to the devil if you are saved."

"Nice words to use about the lady whom you honored with your attentions a few hours ago. Shall I repeat to her the elegant compliments you have paid her?" answered Bertie in his passion.

"You can do as you like about that—it's a matter of indifference to me. But this is childish, Bertie. I came not to reproach you, or to listen to your reproaches. If you will still believe that I have wronged you, I must try and bear your injustice; though Heaven knows I haven't deserved it."

"Why the deuce need you interfere with me at all? Why can't you leave me alone?"

"You know why I can't, Bertie. You know why it is impossible for me to stand by and see you go to ruin your own way without trying my best to save you. Do you think anything but the remembrance of the strong tie you have upon me would have induced me to do as I have done? Do you think any other living being, after having received such an insult as I last night received from you, would come the following morning to greet the man who inflicted it, as if nothing had happened; ignoring his own humiliation, conquering his own pride? I never would have, I never could have, but for the remembrance of the promise I made to her—"

"And it is for her sake, I suppose, that you have opposed me in every way—that you have constantly thrust yourself between me and my wishes. I'm glad at least you've dropped the confounded twaddle you used to talk about your affection for me."

Bertie threw himself back with the petulance of a spoilt child, and Guy was silent for a moment, thinking how difficult it was to speak to him rationally in his present mood.

"Men don't talk much about their affection for each other, as a rule," he said presently. "If I ever spoke of mine to you it was because, at the time of my mother's death, I felt as if I ought to be to you more like a father than a brother. I am so

much older than you, and the difference in our ages was still more apparent then, when you were a mere boy, and I a man who looked nearly twenty years your senior. Latterly I have only tried to show you that I would do all I could for you."

"I felicitate you on what you have done," sneered Bertie.

Stung by his ingratitude, Guy answered with warmth, "I have done all I can—given you as large an allowance as, taking everything into consideration, the keeping up of the estate and that sort of thing, it seems to me I can afford; paid your debts and never said a word, as perhaps I ought to have done, when I have seen you living far beyond your income; though of course I know that all debts and liabilities you incur will sooner or later come upon me."

"By Heaven, I can't stand this!" cried Bertie. "Have you come here to taunt me with my dependence? You need scarcely trouble yourself about my debts. I can very well bear my own burdens."

"Do you think that as long as I have a penny in the world I will refuse to help you out of your difficulties? It was you who drove me, by your accusations, to speak of these things, which I would never otherwise have mentioned."

There was a silence. Then Bertie rose. "I must go," he said, moodily; "I have an engagement."

Guy rose also, and looked hard at him for a moment. Then, as he turned away without even shaking hands, he said—

"Bertie, are we to part like this? I came, hoping to end the estrangement which seems to be growing up between us. Are we to go on like this forever, seeming more like enemies than friends?"

"As long as you set yourself in antagonism to me, as long as you persist in your present line of conduct with regard to this matter, we shall be enemies."

"Do you refer to—"

"To Mademoiselle Ragoni? Certainly I do." He turned and faced Guy, and spoke with more firmness and decision than he usually showed.

"Is it possible that you can still believe in a woman who has treated you as she has done?"

"I never blamed her, only you; it was not her fault, only yours. I was angry with her for a moment, but I have forgiven her long ago. Did you think my love for her could be so easily turned aside? Did you think you could come between us and separate us? Ah, no." With a look that had in it something more than defiance of his brother's power; that had love, and trust, and faith in the woman who was so ready to betray him. "By and by we shall forget all this that has passed, and laugh at your futile efforts."

Guy could scarcely suppress a groan. It seemed to him there was something almost grand in this absolute trust and faith, this blind love; and when he thought how little worthy this woman was of such true devotion, how she scorned, and despised, and betrayed it, he felt a bitter detestation for her; and a strange, unnatural craving to be revenged upon her took possession of him.

"You mean—"

"That I will marry her yet, in spite of you."

"And I will save you yet, in spite of yourself, if I can; and if I can't, Heaven help you." And so saying, Guy took up his hat and left the room, as Bertie disappeared through the door which led into the adjoining one.

He walked along mechanically, so absorbed in painful thought that he neither knew nor cared where he went, until, suddenly waking up to consciousness, he found himself on the other side of the Park; and, forming a sudden resolve, he turned his steps Grosvenor Square-wards.

CHAPTER XXIII.



ES, Mrs. Hoare was at home," and Guy ascended the stairs, and unannounced opened the drawing-room door.

The scene that met his eyes presented a strange, almost painful contrast to his own sombre thoughts. A white cloth, thrown down to protect the carpet, strewn with heaps of brilliant hothouse flowers; two girls and a child seated on the floor in carelessly artistic attitudes, arranging them in delicate vases and great Indian-china bowls.

Kitty, with her black frock, her simply bound chestnut hair, and her pale, tender face bent low over a bunch of crimson roses; Lily Ransford, with her brilliant coloring, her gleaming golden locks, her pink-and-white cheeks, her red lips, and her gay costume of white muslin and blue bows, dipping her dimpled rosy fingers into the flower mass; and the child, holding up a gorgeous Passion-flower against her own fair baby face; a little farther off another child buried among the cushions of a sofa, intent on a book; and seated at a little table drawn near the window, Mrs. Hoare, in a simple morning dress, with a charming assumption of dignity and matronhood in the little lace cap that adorned her pretty head, writing letters.

These were the salient points of the picture, which Guy stood for a moment to observe; but his entrance was greeted by a shout of welcome from Lily Ransford and the children.

"Come in, Cousin Guy," cried Lily. "Why are you standing there, like—"

"Like the Peri at the gate of Paradise; but since the angels bid me enter, I suppose I may?" and he came forward with a smile. "You look so delightfully cool and beautiful."

"Does the 'beautiful' apply to us or the temperature? You always talk like the Sphinx, Cousin Guy."

"If I could paint a picture of you all just as you are, you

wouldn't ask, Lily; shall I try a new and improved edition of Millais' 'Apple Blossoms?'"

"I don't feel flattered by the suggestion; it's rank heresy, I know, but the carrots predominate so strongly over the flowers, that I never could admire that picture," answered Lily, with a little *moue* of disdain.

"Oh, sweet girl-critic 'with the golden hair,' don't be so severe."

"Shade of Tennyson! what right have you to misquote my favorite poet, sir?"

But Guy did not hear her. He had shaken hands with Kitty last of all, and he was instantly struck by the coldness of her manner. It chilled him suddenly, set him wondering what he could have done to offend her; but there was no sense of offence, no sign of feeling of any sort shown in her manner. She only just touched his hand, and looked up into his face with the most polite indifference. The blushing hesitation, the half-repressed tenderness of yesterday, which had seemed as if she longed yet feared to give him hope, were gone.

Was it only her coyness, or only his fancy?

He tried to think so, and set himself to please her.

"Can I offer my assistance, Lily? You are only playing; Miss Lorton is doing all the work. What is the aim and object of all this decorative art?"

"Don't you know Clara is going to have one of her stupid kettledrums—idiotic affairs. . Are you going to be one of the victims? We sent you a card."

"What are kettledrums? They've come into fashion since my time."

"What are they? Festive occasions when we young people immolate ourselves on the altar of society; and to propitiate the gods—I mean the old ladies—consume a little bad tea and a great deal of gossip."

"It isn't necessary that the tea should be bad, Lily," put in Mrs. Hoare.

"No, but the gossip must be. It wouldn't have any flavor if it wasn't—well—*tant soit peu méchante*."

"Lily, Lily, what will people think of you, if you run on like that?"

"Who are 'people'? My present audience consists of Guy and Kitty. As for Guy, I've existed so long without his good opinion, *sans doute* I can do it in the future. And Kitty, she knows me better than to think badly of me—don't you, little mouse?"

Lily bent her pretty head and touched Kitty's pale cheek with the flowers she held in her hand, with a coaxing tenderness; and Kitty looked back at her and smiled.

There had grown up a sudden liking between these two. Lily Ransford was staying in Grosvenor Square on a visit, and she, in her impetuous, school-girlish way, had grown quite fond of the little governess. She was so genuinely good-natured, so merry, so lovable—though people did call her "slangy" and "fast"—that Kitty could not choose but like her; and felt terribly ashamed of her own jealousy of her on the day of the picnic; all the more so since she had discovered that the intimacy between Lily and Guy Lawrence was so purely a cousinly one, and that it was that other beautiful, resplendent woman, whom she had seen with him on the drag, who probably held him captive *pour le moment*.

She sat very silent, arranging her flowers, answering the questions Guy addressed to her as briefly as possible, speaking now and then to Lily or the children, but appearing to take no interest in anything that was going on around; and Guy was growing more and more puzzled and tormented by her manner.

"There, put that pale rose next to the deep crimson one—contrasts are *chic*. Those two go very well together, and yet they are as much unlike each other as—as—" with a sudden brilliant idea, "you and Cousin Guy. The little white rose is most like you, Kitty, and the crimson—"

"Thank you, Lily," interrupted Guy, ruefully, "for the con-

parison. I know I'm very unpresentable, but has my complexion *quite* attained to that hue?"

There was a laugh—then continued the ceaseless chatter.

"Don't you wish there was a stream in the middle of Clara's drawing-room, that we might play at fortune-telling, like we used to do at school?—send the roses floating down side by side, and see how long they would keep together. For instance, you and—"

"Lily, give me that heliotrope, and now a piece of maiden-hair—we shall never have done if you talk so."

"Oh you wise, industrious little creature! I never could continue long at one thing. Guy, why weren't you at Lady Dancy's last night?"

"Don't know—forgot all about it."

"Where were you?"

"At — in the country."

"What were you doing 'at — in the country?' You couldn't have gone far, for you were here yesterday morning, and here you are again."

"I dined at Richmond with some friends."

"Those men's dinners," pouted Lily; "unsociable, horrid affairs! Why don't they ask *us* to go with them?"

"Perhaps we should be *de trop*," said Kitty, speaking with strange emphasis.

Guy looked at her in surprise. It seemed to him that she meant more than she said; that she, having more knowledge, perhaps, of the bad side of life than Lily, who was fresh from school, knew that women of a certain class generally formed part of these Richmond dinners. If she had meant that, then her speech was out of taste, misplaced, and almost unlady-like. Guy felt quite angry with her for a moment—he did not know all she had seen and heard, and that it was only pique and jealousy that led her to make that little bitter speech about being *de trop*.

He did not know that she was accusing him in her heart of duplicity and falsehood; of leading them to believe it was "one

of those men's dinners," when she, with her own eyes, had seen him sitting side by side with that beautiful woman, and heard that he was "always with her and going to marry her."

Guy rose from his lowly seat; he was vexed with her, and went to console himself with the little girl who lay curled up on the sofa.

"What are you studying so attentively, little one?" he said, caressing the child's fair locks.

"Miss Lorton's confessions."

There was a laugh, and Kitty blushed crimson.

"You *are* behind the age, Guy," explained Lily. "Don't you know it's the fashion for young ladies to keep these books, and get all their friends to write therein their favorite authors, heroes, amusements, ideas of perfect happiness, etc.? Why, I keep one, of course."

"And I did, as you see, long ago, when I was a young lady, and had friends to write in it; but it's one of the follies I've got over, and I gave the book to Mignonette to play with."

Guy opened the book, and saw one page written by his mother, one filled by Bertie's scrawly boyish caligraphy, and another by Kitty's own school-girlish handwriting.

"Come, Cousin Guy, we'll make a martyr of you, as you dared to pry into our mysteries. Write your confessions immediately."

"Don't trouble him, Lily: they will be lost to the world; I've given up my confession book and mean to hide it away forever—I only keep it for the sake of one handwriting."

But Kitty's voice was drowned, and Guy was teased and coaxed until he wrote a farrago of nonsense that elicited a great many "Oh, how sillys" from Lily, who was looking over his shoulder.

"Now for the motto—your favorite motto, Guy?"

Guy thought a moment, and then he wrote—

"*Loyal je serai durant ma vie.*"

"Is that your favorite, really?"

"Yes, really; it is the refrain of a little song I heard sung once, long ago—before my mother died."

His face grew very grave and quiet. They thought he was thinking of his dead mother.

"Why, Miss Lorton sings that song," lisped Mignonette: "'Little bird, little bird—'" and she began singing in her baby voice.

They all laughed except Kitty.

"Come, Mignonette, the flowers are done: we must be gone."

And she marched Mignonette, confession book in hand, out of the room, in a sober, governessified way, and nobody saw her flushed cheeks and curling lips except Guy, and he noted them with sorrowful surprise, and bewilderment as to their cause. Was she offended with him, or jealous of the way in which he and Lily went on together? It was surely not possible, after all he had said and done, that she could misunderstand him so; she could not think that he had changed since that day—such a little while ago—when he had asked her to be his wife? He resolved that when she appeared again he would let her see plainly that he loved her as well as ever, and then—and then—

The rest of his reflections faded away into a mist of uncertainty; but the effect of them was, to make him accept Mrs. Hoare's pressing invitation to appear at her "drum," and to remain to dinner and spend the evening with them.

"They would be quite alone, for a wonder; had no engagement of any sort, and would be so glad if Guy would stay and share their unusual solitude."

And he promised he would; with an *arrière pensée*—the hope of speaking a word to Kitty alone.

And Kitty, the instant the drawing-room door closed after her, regardless of the pain to her sprained ankle—which had not quite recovered—rushed up the stairs at a rate that amazed her little pupils, and taking the unfortunate confession book almost abruptly from little Mignonette's hand, left them to go into the school-room alone; then limping up another flight of

stairs, went into her own small room and banged to the door, locked it, and leant against it, breathless with haste and anger. No longer under any restraint, she gave way to a perfect storm of passion, she raged up and down the room like a little fury, she flung the book down on the ground and trampled on it, looking at it with a face distorted and livid with rage.

It was the climax of Guy's many offences—the writing of that motto. How dared he remind her of that time? How dared he, who was so false, take that motto for his own?

Loyal? *He* loyal! Even in writing it he had tried to cheat and deceive her, by pretending that it was the remembrance of her song that made it dear to him. He didn't know that she knew all about him this time—that she was no longer to be deluded. She laughed a bitter little laugh at that thought. Utterly unreasonable in her passion, she at one moment accused him of being incapable of loving, and in the next of being desperately in love with the woman whom she had seen with him on the drag. She picked up the book she had thrown down and tore out the sheet on which Guy had written, crumpling it up in her hand and digging her fingers into it with as much energy as if it were Guy himself whom she was punishing; then throwing it into the farthest corner of the room, burst into a storm of crying.

She stayed there for a long while. She and the children had their early dinner by themselves in the school-room when Mrs. Hoare had her parties, and to-day Kitty left them to have it alone. They came to her door several times, and each time she sent them away, telling them she had a headache. The slow hours dragged on; she heard the sound of carriages, and she knew that the guests were arriving, but still she did not move. How sad it was, she thought, to sit there alone and forgotten, while downstairs they were enjoying themselves. Then another voice at the door—Lily Ransford's this time.

"Kitty, where have you hidden yourself? Open the door—be quick—can't wait. Come down directly, we are all wanting you."

"I can't come; please tell Mrs. Hoare, and ask her to excuse me—I have a headache."

"Nonsense, I know it's all an excuse. Come down directly, and don't be frightened. I'll take you under *my* wing. You silly Kitty, why don't you open the door? Well, I can't wait," and then the sound of retreating footsteps, and then—stillness and solitude.

It grew quite late; the sun was losing some of its power when Kitty rose up and went slowly to the glass. Her pupils would be coming up and wanting their tea—she must go to them; so she smoothed her hair and bathed her face and turned to leave the room; but at the door she paused, hesitated, and then, very slowly, went and picked up the piece of paper she had torn out of her book.

She held it in her hand and looked at it very wistfully. It was so torn and crumpled that most of it was illegible; but one small piece had almost escaped the general destruction; one line stood out clearly before her eyes in the bold, firm writing—

"Loyal je serai durant ma vie.

GUY LAWRENCE."

His signature. She looked at it so long that her heart grew weak. She could not destroy that. She tore it off from the rest, and folding it up, put it away and locked it up safely in a small carved ivory box where some precious relics and keepsakes, that to ordinary eyes looked very much like rubbish, were stored, and then carefully destroying the remainder of the leaf, and hiding the torn book, unlocked the door and went her way to the school-room.

Meanwhile Guy Lawrence had been fidgeting about in his cousin's drawing-room, mentally wishing all the ladies, old and young, at Jericho, and by his experience generally endorsing the truth of Lily Ransford's statement, that kettledrums were a newly-invented form of martyrdom.

Where was Kitty? He heard the message sent up to her, and the answer thereto conveyed in an audible whisper from

Lily to Mrs. Hoare. He heard his cousin express surprise, almost annoyance at it; and he wondered—wondered very much—whether he was the cause of it.

Everything must have an end—even a kettledrum; and with gloomy satisfaction Guy watched the guests depart. Then came dinner—but no Kitty. He supposed that she never appeared at that meal, as no surprise was expressed at her absence. Surely she would be in the drawing-room afterwards? He hurried up as soon as he could, and found Mrs. Hoare and Lily seated in low chairs close to the open window, and the children running about in and out of the balcony; but the one he sought was not there.

He joined them, and at last he spoke of her; wondering at himself half angrily for finding it so hard to mention her name carelessly.

“What has become of Miss Lorton? We have not seen her since she arranged the flowers.”

“I don’t know, I’m sure, where she is. I think it was rather too bad of her, when she knew I depended on her to help with the music, to make an excuse and—”

“Clara, you mustn’t be hard on her; she hates coming down when there are a lot of people here, you know,” said Lily.

“Well, where is she now? We can’t sing those duets without her—why doesn’t she come now?”

“I’ll go and fetch her,” said Lily, good-naturedly, rising from her easy chair.

“No, you went once—you shan’t go again. Send one of the children.”

“No; let me go, Clara;” and before her sister could stop her, she was away.

Her kind heart made her sorry for the poor little lonely, forlorn creature. She found her sitting in the dreary room, crouched up on the window-seat, staring out with sad, aching eyes into the twilight.

Kitty was feeling as if the loneliness and the misery she was suffering were nearly driving her crazy, and she yielded to

Lily's persuasions and came down with her—but she paused on the landing.

"Lily, my hair is rough, and my dress—I—I feel so shabby beside you," and she glanced from herself to Lily in her pretty, airy, floating demi-toilette.

"Oh no, you're all right; you look nice in anything—come along."

Kitty smiled wearily. She felt as if she almost loved the bright, happy girl who in the midst of gayety and happiness found time to think of her; as if she could have flung her arms round her neck and thanked her for her kindness. But she was growing strangely quiet and proud and self-contained, and she said not a word—only walked in demurely by Lily's side, and tried not to blink at the sudden glare of light—tried not to look as confused and miserable as she felt.

She never knew how the evening passed. It was a long one both to her and to Guy. She played accompaniments, sang duets, and made herself generally useful; till finding she was no longer wanted, and no one was likely to notice her, she crept away into the balcony by herself.

And Guy tried to talk and to seem as usual, but all the while he was watching her, and wondering about her: and when he saw her go out there alone, he waited for a few moments and then followed her.

"You seem to avoid me to-night," he said, as he stood by her side: "have I offended you?"

"Offended me?" she answered, coldly; "what reason have you had for thinking so?"

"Your distant manner—you scarcely answer me; when I asked you to sing, you refused."

"That is a privilege I still retain with my employer's guests. Mr. Lawrence, I have not quite given up all freedom of thought and action."

And with a disdainful little toss of her head, she turned and re-entered the room; and when he, after a few minutes, followed her, she had left it.

CHAPTER XXIV.



UY LAWRENCE resolved that this state of things should not continue any longer.

It was not fit or becoming, he told himself, that he should be made the sport of a young girl, that he should be encouraged by her one day, and treated with rudeness the next. Many times he asked himself whether he should not leave her forever, be content to accept her refusal of him, and never speak to her again of his love: but then he remembered how, by her manner on the evening of the picnic, and on the day or two subsequent to it, she had belied her words—how she had seemed as if she did in truth love him; as if she would, but for her shyness, have retracted what she had said to him in a moment of anger—and again his heart was softened to her, and he felt that he could not separate himself from her or give up hope, while yet there remained a chance that she might still love him.

He would see her again, and again tell her that on her hung all his hopes of future happiness; he would tell her that this time her yea or nay would be final.

He would beseech her to confess the truth, and not let any false pride, or any small desire for revenge, come between them and drive them asunder forever.

He would tell her how his heart was full of tenderness for her—how it yearned for her; he would tell her how, through these sorrowful years, he had thought of her, and loved her with a love that would not be repressed—it would be hard indeed if she would not listen to him, if she repulsed him, as she did on the balcony.

So the next day, Guy Lawrence went out determined to see Kitty, and to see her alone; for he thought that it might perhaps be some fear of Mrs. Hoare that had made her behave as she had done on the previous day. Moreover, he did not desire to compromise her in his cousin's eyes, so he wished to see

her without any one's knowledge. With that object in view he found himself, about four o'clock in the afternoon, pacing up and down the streets, close to Grosvenor Square, which commanded a view of the house—waiting until Kitty, with her pupils, should cross over into the square gardens ; where, as he had ascertained from his little cousins, they usually spent these hot afternoons. He smiled sardonically at his own folly in walking up and down there, like a love-sick boy in search of his lady-love ; but still he stayed on and on, till, when he had nearly given up hope of seeing her that day, and had evidently excited the suspicions of a policeman by his prowling about, he caught sight of the flutter of a white dress just disappearing through the gate, and he arrived there in time to see Kitty and the children vanish among the trees.

He could not stay there peering over the sooty railings in full view of the house, so he walked slowly round and loitered about until he found a stray nursery maid, and prevailed on her to grant him admittance into the square. Once within its sylvan precincts, it was not very difficult to discover the white cotton dress and little black bonnet that he was seeking.

Kitty was sitting under a tree, apparently intent on a book, and the children were at some distance playing croquet. Her head was bent down, and Guy came round behind her and stood close by her side before she saw him.

"Miss Lorton," he said, holding out his hand. "I have been searching for you."

She looked up, and for a moment her face showed nothing but surprise ; but it instantly changed to such passionate anger that Guy drew back startled.

"You here ?" she said. "Why do you pursue me—can't you leave me alone, even here ?"

"Kitty, what have I done to you, that you should speak to me like this ?"

"Done ! ask rather what have I done to you, that you are not content to have insulted and humiliated me once ? Are you trying to drive me from the only home I have in the world,

that you are doing your best to make the only people who are kind to me think ill of me? What possible motive—?”

“Hush, Kitty; spare me these reproaches, which are false and undeserved. Sit down and listen to me. I have a few words that I must say to you, and you must hear them.”

He spoke so quietly and gravely that Kitty, awed into momentary silence and submission, sat down again; and he placed himself by her side.

“I came to you, not to drive you from your present home, but to offer you mine again. You say I insulted you once, you have your revenge now, that I, who think myself proud, come to you again, though you have rejected me once.”

She smiled bitterly.

“I know how sore a trial it was for your pride to stoop to ask me to be your wife; I know why you did it—because your conscience taught you you had behaved dishonorably, and it was the only compensation you could make me. But do you think I would accept the love offered to me from a tardily awakened sense of honor—or from pity?”

“I asked you to be my wife, because I loved you, and I dared to hope you might perhaps return my love. I have come again with the same object, and with the same hope; but unless you love me, I will not plead with you to marry me for my sake—because I love you so, and must be utterly miserable without you—for I should be fearful of my power to make you happy; but Kitty, Kitty, it is because my own love is so unchangeable, so undying, the one and only love of my life, that I find it so hard to believe that you, if you ever loved me as you said you did, can have changed.” He paused for a moment, and she interrupted with a scornful little laugh.

“No doubt it is impossible for you to believe that any one can be so blind as not to love you.”

But he went on without heeding her.

“And so I have come to you again, because I have thought that it may be you have rejected me from some small desire for revenge, some unconquerable pride, which forbids you to accept

the love of a man who has wounded you—as I once unhappily did. Kitty, I know you so well; I have studied every word, every look of yours. Was I wrong in thinking that on those days—the evening of the picnic, and the two days after—I read in your words, your looks, your manner, that you still loved me a little?”

“Wrong, wrong—utterly wrong,” she cried passionately, drawing away her hands from his, which would have taken them.

“Your very bitterness and hardness to me, the very passion of your answers, makes me think that it is some feeling of offence that actuates you. Tell me, Kitty, have I done anything? Surely, surely, I cannot have hurt you, when all my heart, all my life is so true to you.”

Her lip curled, but still she was too proud to accuse him.

“Is it not enough that I have told you once I do not love you?”

“It is true, then? I only ask you for the truth. I was a fool to doubt you, only—only once or twice it seemed to me—ah! well, never mind what it seemed; but while there was a vestige of hope, I would not give you up. Once before we were separated; I was forced to let you misunderstand me, and think I did not love you, when my heart was breaking for you. This time, when no such barrier exists between us, when nothing seals my lips, I am determined that no misunderstanding shall be the cause of our separation. You, and you alone, shall speak the word which shall divide us, if we are to be divided; on your head shall be the blame, if you send me from you, and make two lives desolate that might have been happy, from some unworthy motive of your own. Be true to yourself, Kitty; speak, tell me: is it that you do not love me, or that you are still angry with me, and cannot forgive me?”

She was so sure that he was still trying to deceive her; she was so sure that she held undoubted proofs of his falsehood. Had she not seen him with that woman, looking into her splendid eyes as she had never seen him look before? Had not

Colonel Temple said he was to be married to her? Had he not been ashamed to speak of her presence at the Richmond dinner? and, conscious of his own guilt, tried to delude Lily and herself about it?

Never for one moment, in the tumult of wounded pride, did she doubt that she was right in her conclusions, or that Guy Lawrence was as utterly false as she thought him; and her anger and passionate indignation against him almost choked her.

"Must I tell you again and again," she cried, starting up, "that I do not love you? Why can't you leave me alone—why do you persecute me like this?"

He looked at her silently; but this time there was something more than sorrow in his face, there was reproach—almost anger. He stood so for a moment, and then he turned away without a word, and left her standing there alone; but he only went a little way, paused, hesitated, then came back to her and spoke very gravely.

"You have said enough, more than enough. It would have been well, perhaps, to have told the truth with less harshness and bitterness; but you have convinced me thoroughly that it is the truth, and I shall never speak to you again on this subject—never see you again at all if I can help it." His voice trembled a little, and he paused for a moment. Then he held out his hand.

"We must part forever; but don't let it be in anger. I will try to forget how you have spoken to me to-day, and remember you only as one whom I have loved—very dearly." But she drew away her hands and held them resolutely behind her, looking at him in the same defiant, scornful way, without answering a word.

"Won't you say 'Good-by?'"

But not one word came to her white, trembling lips, not one momentary sign of softening changed the passionate anger of her face. Guy, stung to the quick, withdrew the hand he had held out, and went away and left her.

Oh, the bitterness of that parting, the misery and shame and remorse of it, that would come back to her through all the long after years, and haunt her to her dying day ! She, stood there and watched his receding figure, and stared vacantly at the little spots of light that danced up and down among the shadows, when the breeze stirred the branches of the trees, and tried to think and to remember what she had done, what she had said ; but nothing came back to her but the ceaseless echo of his words, " We must part forever." Yes, forever ; he was gone forever.

And Guy ? It was well, perhaps, for him that the anger in his heart somewhat obliterated the misery and shame ; well, perhaps, that he could not remember that he had parted with the girl whom he loved, and lost all hope of winning her for his wife, without recalling, too, how cruelly and remorselessly she had wounded him by the bitterness of her rejection.

He was very angry with her. He hardened his heart against her, and tried to persuade himself that it was well that he had parted from her forever ; well that he was convinced of his own madness, and could no longer be made the fool of a girl's caprices.

As he strode hastily along the sun-stricken streets, a bright face peered out at him from a brougham-window, a face that seemed more than ever beautiful in contrast with the gloom and anger of the one he had just left. A daintily gloved hand pulled the check-string, and in a moment Guy Lawrence was leaning over the carriage door, holding the delicate hand in his, and looking into the face of the most beautiful woman in London.

The sight of her was like a draught of champagne to a man who is depressed. Like an exotic, Celia expanded and spread out her leaves in the sunshine ; when other people were drooping and panting with the heat, she was in her glory. The fiercest rays of the sun seemed only to lend her new life and gayety, and to reflect their brightness into her sparkling eyes.

The animal predominated so greatly over the spiritual in her

nature, that she was always more than ordinarily influenced by physical sensations. Like a child, she could not endure the slightest bodily pain; like a child, she was so full of buoyant life and health, that when the air was light and the sun was bright, the mere fact of existence was enjoyment to her, and whatever causes for sorrow or disquietude she may have had, she seemed unable to remember them.

Perhaps it was only partly real and partly assumed, this joyousness of manner on this particular day; perhaps she wished to make Guy forget how she had spoken, and how they had parted two nights ago.

"I'm going to have a little drive into the country all by myself. I feel just like a child let out for a holiday. It is such a luxury to get rid of Mrs. Robarts for one afternoon. I've given her leave to go and see some old aunt who's dying, and I couldn't go in the Park alone."

"You will have to be back for the theatre?"

"Of course, but there are still two or three hours."

"Will you let me come with you?"

Celia colored, hesitated, and then looked up with a charming smile.

"What will people say—?"

"Whatever they please," answered Guy, jumping in and seating himself by her side, as she gathered up her flowing skirts to make room for him. "Does the man know where to go?"

Then as they rolled along, and Celia sat for a moment silent, with slightly flushed cheeks, he said with a smile:

"'Tis very selfish of me, I know, but I feel in a position to defy the world, and the opinion thereof. I can't imagine a more pleasant beguilement of the hot summer hours than rolling along into the country in a soft-cushioned carriage, with you by my side."

"Are you turning Sybarite?" she answered, smiling.

She could scarcely repress the pleasure which she felt in having him with her, and it showed itself very plainly to Guy.

His heart was sore with grief, his pride had been bitterly wounded; and the flattery of her tender looks, her gentle caressing manner, soothed him more than he would perhaps have cared to confess. Rejected with unnecessary contempt, humiliated by one woman, what man would not turn with pleasure to the lustrous eyes and thrilling voice that woo him and console him with the belief that there is at least one woman who finds him not unworthy of love?

Those few hours spent with Celia poured balm on the wounds that Kitty had so ruthlessly dealt. She saw that he was gloomy and depressed, and setting herself to please him, succeeded passing well. She was a clever woman; she knew when to talk and when to be silent; she knew how to make her silences soft and seductive, and more expressive than words; and how to make her conversation brilliant and amusing. She was very apt at picking up ideas and subjects from the clever people with whom she, being a famous actress, was constantly brought in contact; and she had all the theatrical behind-the-scenes gossip, which is so amusing to an outsider, at her tongue's end; so that when they drew up before her house, after a long drive, and a short stroll in country lanes, and Celia, looking at her little jewelled watch, declared she had only half an hour in which to dine and get to the theatre, Guy could scarcely believe the time had passed so quickly.

He said so, and she looked up with a pleased smile.

"You will come to see me to-night?"

"At the theatre? No; I don't care to see you there. What man would be pleased to see a woman whom he likes, stared at by hundreds of gaping idiots?"

She looked down half piqued, half glad.

"Then come after the theatre; I'm all alone to-night."

Scarcely waiting for his answer, she left him; and Guy, walking homewards by himself, for the first time in his life compared these two women, the one whom he loved, and the one who loved him, to the disadvantage of the former.

Kitty had been angry, vindictive, and fierce when he had

done her the greatest honor that it is possible for a man to do a woman. But Celia, forgetful of the offence he had given her but a short time ago, had been soft and pleasing in her manner, and had, he thought, shown the real nobleness of her disposition in her readiness to forgive.

Guy Lawrence, not above the weakness which makes all men prone to think well of those who so evidently think well of them, began to feel that he had partly misjudged Celia: given her credit for all the evil, but not for all the good, which she really possessed, and that under tuition and guidance her character might change, and develop into something really grand and good.

But of Kitty he thought hard things that day, for he could not forgive her her unjust treatment of himself.

Notwithstanding his refusal, Guy did appear in the stalls at the end of the second act of "*La Belle Sorcière*;" and when the performance was over he went to the stage-door of the theatre, and waited until Celia should issue forth.

For the first time since she had appeared before the public the beautiful actress left the theatre and drove home escorted by a man, and without her ever-watchful chaperone; and people began to talk and to couple her name with Guy Lawrence's, wondering whether he was "going to cut his brother out," or whether "she was going to play the same will-o'-the-wisp sort of game with both of them."

That evening when Guy bade her good-by, Celia sat by the piano where he had left her, one hand still unconsciously playing the notes of the last song she had sung to him, with a dreamy, languid thoughtfulness on her face, and a wistful tenderness in her drooping eyes.

"*'Dites lui, dites lui.'* Ah, if I could; but he must know—surely he must know." And then her face dropped on her hands as if to hide the crimson flush that spread over it, even to her forehead.

And Guy strolled on under the quiet stars with those same words ringing in his ears—the refrain of a song which he had

never liked until that night, when it had seemed to gain a passionate intensity from the beautiful lips that had uttered it "*Dites lui que je l'aime, et que je suis belle.*"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE London season was nearly over ; another campaign was almost ended ; and society was about to go through the last engagement of its annual civil war—at Goodwood. Many who had gone into the conflict in all the contemptuous haughtiness of strength, with head erect and pennon proudly flying, had come out of it crushed, humbled, wounded to the death—the one vulnerable point of their harness had been found, and they had fallen, pierced through and through, *sans merci*. Others, with no ruder weapons than the lightning glances of their bright, flashing eyes, or the irresistible attack of low-toned winsome tongues, had left the field strewn with their victims, imploring, cursing, writhing, wounded to the heart ; while the victors in triumph led their chosen captives to domestic bondage. Reputations had been assailed, rent, and torn in shreds ; the innocent had suffered with the guilty ; idle tongues had joined with malicious ones in the slanderous slaughter, and the havoc had been, as usual, terrible. Injustice, tyranny, dishonesty, and fraud had been condoned, and even applauded—because successful. Men had toiled and lied, and bartered honor and conscience for wealth and worldly position. Women had plotted and schemed, and envied and hated one another with all the bitterness and malevolence that only such a rivalry can foster, as they struggled and jostled for coronets and money-bags—the prizes of the season. Honor, love, and truth had dwelt amongst them too ; though almost stifled by the pestilential atmosphere, though hidden and well-nigh lost in the unsympathetic crowd, in some

places they had taken root too deeply to be eradicated. But now the struggle was almost at an end, and the combatants—even the victorious ones—looked tired, worn, and jaded. The jaunty bearing, the placid smile that masked the wounded spirit torn with abortive hopes, new-born griefs, or bitter, heart-sickening disappointments, could be cast aside in the secrecy of solitude, and fresh strength nurtured to begin the fight anew.

Affairs of all sorts were coming to a crisis; affairs parliamentary, affairs monetary, and above all, affairs matrimonial.

Who would see his lady-love go off to other scenes, and run the risk of "other lips and other hearts telling their tale of love" to her, when he might prevent it?

Doubtless there were many love-scenes being enacted in London on this particular day of which I write, but there was one in which the chief actors were more like combatants than lovers, an *affaire de cœur*, in which two people met to fight *à outrance*. A man and a woman, unequally matched, for the man staked all his heart and soul on his success, and the woman staked—nothing.

"Let me speak to you; I must. You bade me hold my peace, and I have obeyed you. You have told me to be patient, and I have tried; but I cannot any longer; I cannot bear the slights you put upon me. I cannot—"

And Bertie Deverell, pacing up and down the room, paused, not from want of words, but because he was a very coward in the presence of this woman whom he loved, and he feared to offend her.

Celia, leaning carelessly back among her cushions and lazily fanning herself, watched him with a half smile upon her full, rich lips.

"Poor Bertie, is he so ill-used then? Come and tell me all about it," she said, with a little mocking laugh.

He turned angrily, and spoke with more firmness than before.

"I *will* tell you all about it. I have come here for that pur-

pose; to tell you that I am not satisfied with your treatment of me, and that I will not bear it any longer. You have led me on, little by little, to love you so slavishly, so hopelessly, that you have made me a very baby in your hands, and you think me a fool, to be caressed one day and insulted the next. When I complain, you laugh at me—tell me not to be jealous. I have tried to believe in you, trust you, and to think that you could not have been deceiving me all this while; Heaven knows how hard I have tried, but I *cannot*.”

“*Et puis ?*”—with a slight elevation of her eyebrows—still monotonously waving her fan.

“Good God!” he exclaimed, glaring down at her. “Are you a woman or a devil, that you mock me and torture me till you drive me nearly mad?”

“Please don’t be violent; it is so warm,” she answered in a plaintive tone, never flinching from the passionate face so close to her own, never even opening her half-closed eyes.

There was a moment’s silence, and then Bertie spoke very quietly; but there was a hard, cold ring in his voice that might have warned her she had driven him very nearly to the extremity of endurance.

“I will have a plain answer to a plain question. Will you marry me? Yes—or no?”

She fixed her eyes full upon him, smiling as if it were impossible for her to repress her amusement.

“And if I say—yes?”

“Then I shall insist on your acknowledgment of our engagement, that I may have a right to protect you, and to prevent your name being sullied by association with any other man’s.”

“And if I say—no?”

“Then—then I should pour on you the bitterest curses that ever woman heard; then—O Heaven!—I think I could understand how men become murderers—how in one moment of insane passion they are oblivious of everything—and have no mercy, no pity. I think I could almost kill you.”

She laughed outright.

"*Dio!* how you rave; you don't do it so badly, but you see I have so much of that on the stage, and they do it better there. Come, I think we've almost had enough of this, though it is very amusing. Suppose you sit down like a rational human being, instead of ranting up and down like a wild beast, or a Hamlet, and let us talk comfortably and quietly, if we must talk. For my part I'd rather have a nice little siesta, and wake up cool and refreshed just in time for the theatre."

"Damn the theatre."

"That isn't polite; I don't allow any one to damn anything in my presence—by the bye, you've said a great many things that were far from polite. Do you know I had a great mind to tell the servant to show you out? I think I should, but for the trouble of ringing the bell. It is *such* bad taste to rave and storm."

"Will you oblige me by talking sense? When you have given me an answer to my question I will rid you of my presence."

Then, changing his mood, he flung himself down by her side, and pressed his hot lips to her cool white hands.

"Oh, Celia, Celia, my love, my darling, tell me you have not meant to deceive me; tell me you care for me, just a little. I do not ask you to love me as I love you—it is such torture, such madness; but only say that you mean to be true to me, and to marry me after all, and I will be content."

"What! even without the conditions you insisted on so forcibly a moment ago? That's fortunate. Bertie, listen to me: it would have been better for you, far better, if you had not forced me to speak again on this subject; as you have, I can only again repeat what I have told you already a hundred times: I will make no promises, no engagement of any sort."

She paused. Bertie had thrown himself on the cushions, and was hiding his face with his hands.

"Long ago you asked me to be your wife, and I told you I was an actress, and it was my ambition to be a famous one; I told you that for the present all my hopes and thoughts were

centred in that one thing, that I had no time to think of wooing or of wedding like other women."

"You told me—"

"Hush!—yes; I told you also that some day I might tire of ambition, and want—what other women want—love and happiness; and then—it might be"—She paused, and her eyes, looking into the distance, seemed to have wandered away into some dreamy vision of the future.

Bertie, hanging on her words as if they were life or death to him, uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Is it to be always like this; am I to be forever content with these vague, meaningless promises?"

"Promises? I made none, I never shall make any; you are free to come or go, to love or leave me, just as you please. Whatever happens you can never say I have deceived you."

"By Heaven! this is too much; you will marry another man, perhaps, and then tell me you have never deceived me; you will destroy my whole life, every hope I have of happiness, and then tell me you have done me no wrong. You have taken care not to commit yourself to words perhaps, but will you tell me that by intention and design you have not led me to believe, as surely as I believe in anything in heaven or earth, that you loved me, and would one day be my wife—will you tell me—"

"Bertie, I will not hear another word. If you choose to do as I tell you, stay here; if you cannot, leave me."

And she sank back languidly among her pillows, as if the subject had exhausted her. Bertie got up, his face as white as death.

"You have driven me a little too far; you think I haven't the power to leave you, but I have; and if I go now I will never look upon your face again."

He went towards the door, moving slowly; looking half stunned and bewildered, as if he had received a sudden blow. She watched him stealthily, and when his hand was on the

door, and she saw that he would really go without a word or one backward glance at her, she murmured very low,

"Bertie."

"That was enough. In an instant he was by her side, kneeling at her feet, uttering frantic, half-articulate expressions of passionate love, reproaching himself for doubting her, and begging her to forgive him; hardly able to keep back the tears from his bright blue eyes.

For one moment she rested her white hand caressingly on his golden hair.

"You silly boy, why must you quarrel with me?" she said gently.

"I will never quarrel with you, if you will say you love me, Celia."

She bent her head down, and whispered something which brought a radiant smile to the face that was looking up so adoringly into her own—and Bertie Deverell's last effort after freedom and independence was as unsuccessful as any of his former ones—he was in the toils again.

A little while after, he left the house with the light step and buoyant air of a man who had been successful in his mission; but as he walked along the elation of his manner faded slowly. Free from the intoxication of Celia's presence, he was better able to think calmly of what had passed; and though that little tender whisper still lingered softly in his ear, he was fain to confess to himself, reluctantly, that he was no nearer to the attainment of his wishes than he was before.

He no longer believed as blindly in his idol as he had once done. Doubts had been forced upon him; he could not help knowing how willing she was to sacrifice him to her own caprice; how vain, how unscrupulous. And seeing her in this new light, he knew that he had no real hold upon her, no fetter with which to bind her to himself. Alas for him! he had begun to discover that his idol was of the earth—very earthy; that this piece of flesh and blood magnificence before which he bowed himself in such abandonment of worship, had

a heart of stone, which all his love could not soften ; and that, after the manner of idols, she imposed endless sacrifices upon her adorers.

The alternate fluctuations of hope and despair were beginning to tell upon Bertie. The feverish uncertainty drove him into continual dissipation ; he had recourse to stimulants, and tried to find a Lethean draught in the cup of excess. His temper, always variable, was more so than ever now ; at one moment he seemed possessed by a wild gayety, the next by a moody gravity.

As he swung along through the Park, he came face to face with the man who was entering it.

"Hullo, Guy!"

"Bertie! just the man I wanted. I was going to your rooms."

"Anything up?"

"No; I was coming to say good-by. I'm thinking of going off to-morrow or the day after."

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, anywhere. I must go to Erlesmere for a day to see Humphreys; he's got some steward's work for me to do—leases to sign, and all that—then I shall come through London for my traps, and off to Italy, Switzerland, Norway—anywhere for a little fresh air and a quiet life. Will you come with me?"

"No, thanks; your destination seems to be rather vague. Well, I shall hear from you, I suppose. Good-by, old fellow!"

But Guy lingered, and there was a wistful look in his worn, anxious face, as his eyes rested on his young brother.

"Is there nothing I can do for you, Bertie—money, or anything—before I go?"

"No, thank you," answered Bertie, hurriedly, swinging his cane and tapping his boot, as if impatient to be gone.

"I wish you'd be off into the country somewhere, young one," said Guy, kindly. "I know you don't like advice, but you're playing the deuce with yourself by the sort of life you

lead ; late hours, dissipating and drinking, soon knock a fellow up."

Bertie laughed carelessly, but still with some irritation.

"All right; reserve the rest of your lecture to our next meeting. What's the good of life if one can't enjoy one's self? You don't seem to have discovered '*il segreto per esser felice*,' as the song says. By-by."

And without another word he was gone.

Guy looked after him for a moment, and then turned into the Park, and slowly wended his way across the arid, burnt-up grass, under the dusty, half-withered trees. There was something intensely depressing in the sight of the deserted Ride; the empty chairs, so lately thronged by a brilliant multitude; and though he cared little for gay crowds and fashionable rendezvous, and rejoiced in the solitude, the gloom of the scene added to the melancholy which oppressed him. He quickened his steps, turning into the leafy avenue of Kensington Gardens, and thence over the grass, and throwing himself on a seat under one of the massive old trees which still spread their branches triumphantly in the very heart of London, gave himself up to his reflections.

The world seemed to him very dark that day—a terrible chaos in which right was hopelessly, inextricably intermingled with wrong. It was not only that his own lot was a hard one. With the calm of despair, he accepted the certainty of his own misery, present and future; he knew that all love, the love of those two he had most cared for, was forever denied to him. But with the loss of all hope, the old tendency to fatalism revived in him; he acknowledged that it was Kismet; he bowed to the inevitable, and resolved that he would no longer struggle against it. But all that he had hoped to do, or tried to do to help others, had ended in failure, or worse than failure also. He was troubled, sick at heart, disappointed. All his watchfulness, all his solicitude on Bertie's behalf, seemed likely to prove abortive. He was hopeless of convincing him of the folly of his passion for Celia. When he had attempted

to prove to him that the only affection of which she was capable was for him, Guy, he had only succeeded in inspiring him with distrust of himself—he had only succeeded in appearing ungenerous, treacherous, and dishonorable in the eyes of the young brother whom he had tried to serve.

It galled Guy almost beyond endurance to see Bertie frittering away his days in attendance on this actress's caprices, and yet he knew that he was powerless to prevent it, that he had tried all the weapons in his armory, and failed. And he resolved to go away and leave him. He felt that his presence was a restraint on Bertie, that his brother showed almost a disinclination for his companionship, and that it would be impossible for him to stay with him, or to follow him, when he should leave town against his will.

"I can't think what he is waiting for," muttered Guy, digging his foot fiercely into the withered grass; "probably until *her* engagement is over, and then he'll follow as a humble retainer in her suite—confound her."

He was savage, desperate, despairing. The brief, careless leave-taking between himself and Bertie had pained him bitterly; had increased the weight of sorrow that already oppressed him; and above and beyond all these real troubles he was worried and distressed about another matter.

Rumor, always busy, yet generally reaching last the ears of those whom it most concerned, had that day taught Guy Lawrence that the world was coupling his name with Celia's, in its usual charitable manner of "thinking no good," and now he was suffering some pangs of conscience; recollecting too late, perhaps, that what he had only meant as a well-deserved retaliation on Celia, and a lesson to Bertie, might have been misconstrued by her as well as by all the rest of the world; recollecting that he was as much bound to behave honorably to her as to other women, and that *his* honor was in jeopardy, and perhaps *her* heart, if she had one.

In his great love for his brother, and in remembrance of the vow he had made always to protect and guard him from every

evil, he had desired to save him at any cost from the hopelessness of a love, or from the worse misery of a marriage without love, with a vain, intriguing woman. The means he had employed, the power he had used over her, he, Guy Lawrence, believed that he had been justified in using, hoping thereby to save his brother. But he had only intended to open Bertie's eyes, to let Bertie see how little Celia cared for him; and on the other hand, to use his influence over her, and beg her to tell his brother the truth. Thus far he had intended to go, but no farther; but little by little he had been driven on, and feeling some real kindness, some real sympathy awaken in him for this woman, he had overlooked the fact that he might be creating in her mind hopes that could never be realized.

"There's nothing to be done but to go away; there's not much fear she'll break her heart, or that *I* have inspired a *grande passion*," he thought to himself, sardonically. "Not much fear that she or any one else will regret me long. I'll go away and bury myself and my dead past out of sight, and I shall soon be out of mind too.

'I'll pledge me for no lady's faith,
Beyond the seventh fair day.'

Small blame to them for their mutability. Shall I blame *her*, poor little girl?" And the sneer died on his lips as his thoughts wandered to her who had so soon forgotten the love she had once confessed. "Change is the law of the world in which we live: and is it not better for those who can change, who can bury their dead quickly out of sight, and without looking back with useless regrets on that which is past, press onward to that which is before; who can live in the present; who can be more impressionable than unchangeable?" Ay, better for Guy Lawrence himself if he could have changed with every wind, have floated with every fresh tide, than to have been so true to those who could so little appreciate his truth.

On his return from Erlesmere, two days later, Guy went to

see Estelle before leaving England. He would willingly have avoided taking any formal farewell of her if he could have done so without appearing unkind. He scarcely knew why, but he had a vague fear of seeing her for the last time, of how she might take the news of his departure; but this very fear made him feel that it would be cowardly to shirk the leave-taking that ordinary politeness required of him. Moreover, if Estelle really felt some sort of gratitude and affection for him she might be softened at the moment of parting. She might listen if he spoke to her of Bertie, she might yield acquiescence to a request she had before denied; and at his persuasion use her influence to induce Bertie to leave town and go abroad to regain his health.

Guy was never faint-hearted where Bertie's interests were concerned; he was quite ready to renew his petitions again and again, until, like the unjust judge, she was wearied into granting his prayer.

The beautiful cause of so much heart-burning and wretchedness lay back as usual among her cushions, doing nothing; looking, in her shady luxurious room, provokingly cool, languid, and far away from the troubles and perplexities of the outside world.

But the dreaminess of her eyes was lost in the glad light that transfigured her face as Guy came into the room, and she, starting up, held out her hands without a word, but with a smile that was more than a welcome. Guy took them absently, and seated himself by her side in the same abstracted, thoughtful way; and when he spoke it was of the subject that was uppermost in his mind.

"I've come to say good-by, Celia."

"Good-by?" she repeated, startled.

"Yes, I am going away."

"Where?"

Her voice trembled, her face paled. It dawned upon her that this was no temporary leave-taking.

"Oh, somewhere, anywhere; what does it matter? I want

to get away from this poisonous atmosphere. I shall probably go abroad again, and not be back for a year or two."

Not a word followed this speech. She sat quite still, but her face had grown white as death, her teeth were clinched together, and her breath came quickly and heavily.

But Guy never noticed any change in her. He who was so tender to those he loved, was unconsciously almost cruel to her.

"It may be such a long time before we meet again, and before I go I want to say one or two things to you."

She interrupted him. "Why need you go—why can't you stay? If you go I feel that I shall never, never see you again."

"Are you sorry to lose me, Celia?" he said with more earnestness and less abstraction. "I believe you are. You are the only one who cares whether I go or stay."

There was a moment's silence. Her heart beat wildly. She knew that this was her last chance, that if she failed to win Guy Lawrence now she lost him forever, and she could scarcely control her agitation.

"I want to leave my only care, my last request to you, Celia. Imagine that I'm going to leave the world, and that I make you executor of my will. Do you accept the trust?"

She bowed her head in silence, and he continued, "My greatest and most serious anxiety in the world is for Bertie, and I want you to use your influence with him."

She threw back her head with a quick impatient gesture, her lips curled, and the hand which held her fan gave such an angry jerk that the brittle toy snapped in two between her strong white fingers, but still she said nothing.

"He is looking most wretchedly ill, and nothing I can do or say, will persuade him to leave town, and take to better hours, and a healthier life. Celia, if you were to join your persuasions to mine, if you were to convince him of the folly and the hopelessness of remaining here, he would perhaps come abroad with me, and time and absence would effect his cure."

Her face was set and drawn, her eyes were lowered as if to hide their fierceness, and when she spoke, her voice was very

low and quiet, yet face and voice were full of a suppressed passion, that seemed as if it must force its way to the surface.

"What do you mean? will you explain yourself more clearly?"

"Is it necessary? will you force me to say what I would rather leave unsaid? don't you know that it is *you* who keep him here? don't you know that he'd wait for you, and follow you to hell itself if only you beckoned? don't you know that until you choose to dismiss your slave from his thankless, wageless bondage, he isn't a free agent? Don't you know that it is his frantic passion for you, who scorn and despise him, that drives him to these wild excesses, which are ruining him, soul, mind, and body? that the alternations of feverish hope and wild despair are teaching him to drown care in drink? One positive word of dismissal from you, and he would come to his senses. And yet you hesitate to speak it. Good Heaven! is it possible? and you are a woman, and they say women are pitiful."

"What right have you to begrudge me his love?" she cried, stung to madness by the bitterness of his words. "Perhaps I cling to it as the only true affection that has been bestowed on me; perhaps some day in my despair I may learn to value it. Oh, surely, surely, if I do not it must be because I am a fool as well as a woman." Then turning fiercely on him, "At any rate, you have no right to deny it to me."

"Yes, I have, because you have no right to it. You accept it, you foster it on false pretences. Do you love him in return?"

"You dare to ask me that question? you dare to taunt me? you who know, ay, must know, that all my life, all my love—oh, what am I saying?" Then, all her pride and passion, all the bitterness of her anger, suddenly melting, she wailed out, "Oh, Guy, Guy, have you no mercy? What am I that you should despise me so? Have some pity on me, for I am indeed most wretched."

"Celia, Celia, what have I done?" cried Guy, in an agony of remorse. "Indeed I never meant— What have I said?"

He tried to draw away her hands, but she hid her face, and for a few minutes her whole frame shook with uncontrolled passion. Then she slowly raised her head, and tried to speak calmly.

"You mustn't mind what I say. It's only my own folly, only that I could not help—oh, Guy, how could I help—loving you?"

He started up suddenly.

"What have I done? Does a curse follow me wherever I go?" he cried passionately.

"Listen to me, Guy," she said, snatching his hand, and pouring out her words in an eager, impassioned torrent. "I shall never see you again; this will be the last time I shall speak to you. I will tell you all the truth, and then we will part, and you will forget my madness; and I—never mind what I shall do, anyway I shall never blame you. It wasn't your fault that you were so good and great that I, seeing you, could not help loving you. You have been my hero, my god, since the days when you took pity upon me, a poor, wretched, miserable outcast. Ah! can't you imagine how I worshipped you, how you were to me as the light of heaven, how you seemed to my childish fancy a being of another world, who had deigned to speak, to look, to smile on me? It wasn't gratitude, it was idolatry, it was the germ of a love that was to wreck my whole life. It has been my one ambition to be thought well of by you: you were my religion, my conscience, and when I became an actress I did it knowing it was wrong, because you had said so, but I wanted to prove to you that I was capable of being something greater than you thought me. I have gloried in my beauty, my talents, not in any thankfulness, but because I hoped they might win your love; but it's all over now; I have hung on every word spoken by you; I have clung to every kindly look, believing, hoping, praying that at last you would care for me; and now—"

She drew away her hands, and for a moment hid her face in them.

"It has come to this; that I, who thought myself brave and strong, cry out in my weakness to you, tearing open the wound that you may see me writhe under it." She started up, the half-shed tears dried in her eyes, and her face grew wan and white again in her despair. "You may scorn me, despise me, hate me if you will; I have been wicked, treacherous, unscrupulous, but had you loved me, Guy Lawrence, I should have been a better woman. You have wrecked and ruined my whole future, and yet you come here to ask me to renounce the only unselfish love that has ever sanctified my life. You think it a terrible thing that your brother should love me—you, who have no pity," and bursting into tears she threw herself down on her knees by his side. "Oh, Guy, have a little mercy, take what you ask, my life, my soul, but oh, give me a loving look, a kind word in return."

She pressed her lips to his hand, raising her beautiful tear-stained face to his, that was bowed down in utter misery and shame, the large drops standing in her great soft eyes.

"Oh, Guy, my love, my love, don't despise, don't loathe me for grovelling at your feet. Oh, don't send me away. Won't you speak? Have you no pity? Oh, Guy—one word!"

Then letting go his hand with inexpressible sadness, her head drooped on her breast. And Guy, troubled beyond measure, tried almost beyond endurance, attempted in vain to answer her.

He felt as if it was almost impossible for him to speak and reject the love which she had thrown at his feet; as if he could not heap shame and humiliation on her who had already humiliated herself so terribly. But it must be done, unless—and there came another thought, the idea of another possibility, which staggered and bewildered him with its strangeness—with the suddenness with which it presented itself to his mind. And little by little, as he looked upon her in the utter abandonment of her misery, this thought took a tangible form and stood before him clearly, and presented itself to him vividly and inexorably as a solution of all his difficulties.

Should he, whose life had lost all sweetness, all value to him-

self, give it for the saving of this woman's happiness—this beautiful woman, who, in her grief and passion, her softened mood, had strangely moved him—and for Bertie's?

The dread that all his brother's life should be wasted in a hopeless passion or in a still more hopeless, loveless marriage, had taken so strong a hold on Guy, that he snatched wildly at any idea that presented a certainty of saving him. It was a fearful crisis in his life, for he could not pause to think calmly or to calculate the cost of the sacrifice which he contemplated; and yet he knew that on his next words hung the fate of his life—and hers. He bent down and gently raised her from where she knelt, then still keeping her hands in his, he looked tenderly into her half-averted face.

"Celia, Heaven help us both! But I must tell you the truth, though, God knows, it pains me more than it will you. I have no love to give you; I don't deserve yours, and I can't return it."

"Go, and leave me," she faltered. "I am ashamed to look at you—ashamed to see you now."

"Yet knowing this," he continued, without heeding her, "would you be content to trust your life with mine—to follow me forever through the world?"

"Content?"

The world of passion that was concentrated in that one word, and in the eyes that were raised to his face!

"Heaven forgive me for taking so much, when I have so little to give in return. I can never love you as a man should love a woman to justify him in asking her to share his life, but all else in my power shall be yours; and I can be good to you, Celia, true and faithful, and tender. Will you trust me?"

For all answer she looked at him.

"My wife!" he said, gravely; and stooped down and kissed her.

A crimson flush spread all over her face.

"Guy, Guy, I am not fit. You will be ashamed of me; you will remember always that—"

"I will remember nothing," he interrupted quietly, "but that you are good and true to me."

He drew her gently to him until her head rested on his shoulder; but even as she lay there, sobbing tears of gratitude and joy, of inexpressible happiness, a wistful look of sadness stole over his face, and his eyes, wandering far away from her, seemed to be gazing into the mists of an unfathomable future.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THOSE words in which Guy Lawrence asked Celia to be his wife were spoken on the impulse of a critical moment; but though he knew when he uttered them how irrevocable they were, how they bound him forever to a woman whom he did not love, he scarcely realized in the excitement of the scene all that they involved.

In quietness and in solitude he was able to estimate with the greatest intensity the full extent of the sacrifice he had made.

A man may tell himself that his life is wrecked, his future hopeless; yet not until he has made a step that is irretrievable, not until he has taken upon himself the burden of daily duties that must be performed, not until he has bound himself to an allegiance that can never end but in death, is he fain to acknowledge that it is possible for his last state to be worse than the first. He may think that the bitterness of death is past, that no pain or disappointment can exceed or indeed equal the pain or disappointment he has already endured, that he has lived his life, and all the long years through which he must exist will only be a question of endurance, and that nothing which he can do or leave undone can materially affect him personally. In his recklessness, his despair, he may take upon himself another burden to those which he already bears,

saying "what matters a little more or a little less," and be destined—as Guy Lawrence was—to discover that there are degrees of wretchedness. In the first excitement of this strange and unexpected phase of life, he was carried away by the impulse of self-sacrifice. The belief that he had done that which would make the only two people who had any claim on his consideration happy, buoyed him up, and obliterated all thought of himself.

Celia, weeping in her humiliation and sorrow, had touched him to the very core, and he had felt that it was but a small thing for him to give what he could, his hand without his heart, his life without his love, to her who had given him all.

And Bertie—the frittering away of his life in a useless dangle after a woman who despised him—the utter ruin of all his hopes and prospects if she married him, would be averted. It was true Bertie would not be likely to see the exact advantage of his brother marrying the woman he loved—but he would, ultimately—Guy had no doubt of that, no doubt that it was for Bertie's real good, and that sooner or later he would thank him for saving him from such a marriage; and he resolved that he would not heed his brother's first anger when he should hear what had passed.

All this he had thought and felt at first, but when a day had passed the reaction came, and everything appeared to him in the gloomiest and most depressing aspect.

Alone at his hotel, disinclined to go out and face the world, yet horribly weary of solitude, Guy Lawrence paced up and down his room like a caged animal who begins to feel how galling is his captivity.

Outside, cabs laden with luggage, rolling to the station; a few old-fashioned carriages, with old-fashioned coachmen half dozing in the sun, with old-fashioned old ladies inside, who cared nothing whether it was in season or out of season, droning along towards the Park; a few sun-beaten, limp-looking foot-passengers; a charming prospect of muslin dresses and

toilettes for the seaside in an opposite window; and a barrel-organ groaning away at "The Last Rose of Summer."

Inside—himself and his own thoughts.

Thoughts of the present, unendurable; of the future, wretched, almost hopeless; of the past—no, of the past Guy felt he could scarcely dare to think. How could he bear to think of the present; for however firmly he had resolved to be unmindful of Bertie's anger, he could not be unmindful of his suffering; he shrank from the thought of that with positive dread, and every pang that Bertie might at that moment be enduring at the discovery of the treachery of the woman whom he loved, woke a double pang in Guy's heart.

As a mother, pitifully tender over her child, tries in vain to nerve herself to witness the sight of its momentary pain by telling herself it is "for its good," so Guy tried to battle against the weakness which made him fear the thought of what Bertie must necessarily endure in this sudden awakening to the truth.

He knew that it was necessary that he should be awakened; but so rudely—and by *him*! That was part of the sacrifice he had determined to make, and he would not flinch, though he knew that he was resigning forever, perhaps, Bertie's trust, Bertie's love; that he would appear to Bertie as the first and primary cause of his unhappiness, and that he would never be able to tell him why he had done this thing—why he had promised to make this woman, whom he did not love, his wife.

All this Guy was determined to try and bear bravely, but he felt as if much thinking of it would drive him mad. Then, was the future more promising? A long vista of weary years spent with a woman who had no tastes, no sympathies, no thoughts, no ideas in harmony with his own; one long endless effort to do his duty, to endeavor to please a capricious, passionate, headstrong woman, who, when her first violent love had spent its force, when the glamour was removed, would probably try his powers of endurance to the uttermost. A loveless servitude, a bondage that would end only in death.

Guy Lawrence, whose motto was "loyal," who tried so hard to tune all the actions of his life to that one word, felt it very terrible that he could not feel wholly loyal to the woman who was to become his wife, that he could not feel proud of her, that he could not divest himself of a feeling of something very like shame at the thought of his marriage with her.

He who so dreaded publicity, he who hated above all things to become notorious or to attract the gaze of his fellow men, was to marry the famous actress, the talked-of, admired, and generally adored Estelle. He shrunk with morbid horror from the thought of meeting other men, of reading in their looks and manner their wonder and curiosity concerning him. He vowed to himself that he would hide-himself—go abroad, shun all those who had known him, and be forgotten; and the place where he had hoped to live out the remainder of his days, the home to which he had hoped to take a young wife to fill his mother's place, must be shut up, or given to Bertie.

It was strange how great a repugnance he had to the thought of Celia's filling the place of the mother whom he had so reverently loved. He had vowed to marry her, to love and honor her, and he would be true to his vow. No doubting thought of her, of her truth and purity, would ever find a moment's resting-place in his heart, but still he could not bear to think of her there—at Erlesmere, the dear old sacred English home, where his mother had lived, and loved, and died, and where once he had hoped to live with the girl whom he had loved with all the fervor and passion of his nature.

Had loved?—was that then among the things of the past—his love for Kitty? did he not love her still? was not his heart aching sorely for her—little, perverse, wilful, unkind Kitty, who would not love him? Ay, all his anger against her was gone now; and now that he had lost her forever he loved her more fervently, more terribly than before.

But between him and her came the remembrance of the woman who was to be his wife, and the thought of Kitty Lorton was among the thoughts of the irrevocable past.

Weary of pacing up and down the room, weary of staring vacantly out of the window, Guy threw himself down on a chair, and burying his face in his hands gave himself up to the gloom and despair which were creeping over him.

No sound in the room but the monotonous buzzing of the flies, the ticking of a clock, the roll of carriage wheels, and the voices and footsteps of the people who passed beneath the open window.

The striking of the clock roused him. Four o'clock : would Celia be expecting him ? Having promised to marry her, was he not bound to fulfil all the duties, commit all the little fooleries that are expected from an engaged man ? He sickened at the idea ; how could he ever get through the time of his engagement to her without either bitterly disappointing and hurting her, or acting a part and being utterly untrue to himself ? When once they were married it would be different ; when she was his wife, and he was bound to her by the most sacred tie, he could be true and faithful, tender and considerate to her : he felt he could better fill the part of a husband than of a lover. How could he go to her with the ardent emprossement of a man who grudges every moment that he is forced to spend apart from the woman who is to be his wife ? how could he find it in his heart to be caressingly attentive, affectionate, reverent, and devoted, as a man should be at such a time ?

He almost groaned at the idea. Better to be married to her at once ; better to make this time, which is the happiest of some people's lives, as brief as possible in theirs. He started up, resolved that he would go to her, bid her throw over the few remaining days of her theatrical engagement, and ask her to marry him at once, and come with him abroad, anywhere, anywhere out of the world, that would be staring and gaping, and wondering and sneering at them. But as he rose up he heard the sound of a footstep on the stairs, and he sat down again, for he knew who was coming, knew too well who and what were coming.

The door opened and Bertie entered, livid with passion, an

open letter in his hand. He threw down his hat and strode up to where Guy was standing.

"There's no need to explain my visit," he said, his voice choked with anger, "you know all about this letter, of course," and he flung it on the table.

"I know nothing of it," answered Guy calmly.

"It's from her--Celia."

"Then I can guess its purport."

There was a pause. Guy looked pale, and his lips were rigidly set. Bertie's eyes glared with passion, and he hissed through his teeth, "So you and that she-devil, that vile, infamous woman--ah, you may wince--have plotted to trick and fool me. You thought, being my brother, to escape the punishment that such scoundrelism--"

Guy interrupted him sternly.

"Stay!" he cried; "if I were *not* your brother you would have already suffered for the words you have dared to utter. You feel aggrieved; you think I have wronged you. In losing Celia--"

"Gracious Heaven! Do you think that her loss can give me a pang now? Do you think I can feel anything but loathing and contempt for such a shameless, degraded wretch? I tell you she would be powerless to move one atom of regard in me if she begged and prayed for it, and grovelled at my feet, as she did at yours."

"Silence!"

"Will you deny it? She avowed it only a moment ago," Bertie went on, with a bitter, mocking laugh. "I have just left her. She, the proud, imperious Estelle, kissing the dust in her humility. And you--the soul of honor and truth, the mirror of chivalry--a treacherous, cowardly fool. Yes, fool!--to be gulled and tricked by a base-born, scheming adventuress, who'll sell herself to any other, as she has sold herself to you, if he bids higher for her painted face and false smiles!"

"Silence, I say!"

"Or is it a mere sentimental quixotism, and is this the

so-called reparation to a woman whom you fancy you have wronged, by making her your mistress?"

"Good Heavens! are you mad? Don't you know that I would *kill* any one else who dared to say such things to me?"

The words were thundered forth, and a light shone in his eyes like the glare of a tiger at bay. Then, in a calmer tone, he continued—

"Listen to me. I don't hope that you, in the blindness of your passion, will see any higher motive for my conduct than one that is base and dishonorable; but in justice to her who is to bear my name, you must, you shall hear the truth. I knew she had no love for you; more, I knew that the preference she showed you was to keep you near her to serve some purpose she had in regard to myself. I knew she loved me. Ah, laugh if you will; it will take more than a contemptuous sneer from you to turn me from speaking the plain, bare truth, as it must be told. I would have saved you from Celia at all hazards, for I knew that a marriage between you would have ended in misery—a continuation of your hopeless infatuation, without marriage, in present humiliation and utter recklessness in the future. I would have prevented all this at any cost, if not for your sake, for the sake of our dead mother. I saw that, blinded as you were, you would have gone to your ruin in spite of me. I also saw, that though I have humbled Celia by my indifference, and repulsed her by my antagonism, she has cherished a long and true love for me. God knows, I have done enough harm in the world! it seemed that I might do some good. By making her my wife I could save her perhaps from a dark and sinful future. I could save you from misery. You have wrung this confession from me. Bertie, think of the wrong you have done me, for I swear to Heaven I have spoken the truth."

There was something impressive in his tone that checked Bertie in the blindness of his fury, but he was still chafing too much to hold his peace.

"And so this noble sacrifice is to save me from that woman

I was weak enough to love," he sneered. "You've cured me of that, and no mistake; I'd see her starving in the streets, and feel no more concern for her than for the pence I'd toss to her. Be wise in time, and spare yourself this martyrdom. You may kick her overboard without the least fear on my account."

Guy looked at him sternly, and his lips trembled as he answered,

"You may condemn me as a fool, perhaps I am one, but your persuasion will never induce me to become a scoundrel. Celia Ragoni is my affianced wife—remember that, and from this moment I request, I demand that you will mention her name with respect."

"I shan't be so proud of the connection as to care to mention it at all;"—Guy's lips curled satirically as he thought what different sentiments Bertie had expressed but a short time ago—with a contempt he could not repress at the meanness, the cowardice of speaking as he did now, of a woman whom he had loved—"but Celia Ragoni, or Estelle the actress rather, is public property, and if you expect to silence every flippant tongue that tacks her name to a coarse insinuation, you'll be tilting at windmills, and no mistake."

Guy bit his lips, and a frown gathered on his face, but he did not speak.

There was a pause—an awkward one, and then Bertie took up his hat.

"Well, there's nothing more to be said, I suppose. I believe that you have treated me dishonorably, infamously—I come to you to demand an explanation of your conduct: you swear to Heaven that what you have done has been for my sake. Incredible and absurd as the whole thing appears, I can't give you the lie; I can only congratulate you on every chance of happiness in your married life, and thank you for having saved me from the devil incarnate in a woman's form."

"I will not quarrel with you, I'm determined."

"No, pray don't, but in case your resolution should fail you, I'd better go."

And Bertie turned to the door, but Guy advanced with a wistful, pained look—"Not like this, Bertie: I'm going abroad. I don't know when we shall meet again; who knows what may have happened before then?"

Bertie stood tapping his boot with his cane, but he did not speak.

"I want you to use Erlesmere while I'm away. I've left all the necessary directions—will you do me this favor?"

A vision of the old house, filled with a gay party in the shooting season, and the well-stocked preserves of the home park, rose before Bertie.

"Oh, yes, by all means, if you like," he replied, with careless hauteur, as if he were conferring, rather than accepting a favor.

"And now—good-by," and Guy held out his hand.

Bertie took it without a word; then turned to the door and left the room, and as the door closed a look almost of triumph passed over Guy Lawrence's face. He had so fully and surely attained the end for which he had striven. Bertie was so completely disillusioned, so effectually saved, it was not for him to grudge any sacrifice for the achieving of such an object. But the look of triumph was but a transient one, and he could not help counting the cost, the terrible cost to himself, of what he had done. All the bitter truths which Bertie had so vindictively and remorselessly hurled at him came back to his mind, and he almost shuddered as he acknowledged to himself that they were truths.

He—whose idea of a wife was of a creature pure, spotless, and as far beyond the whisper of the world's poisonous gossip as that proverbial wife of Cæsar's—was to take unto himself one whose name had been on every tongue, whose beauty had been exhibited to every eye, the probability or improbability of whose virtue had been discussed and jested about in every club-room in London. The thought maddened him—in vain

he tried to rid himself of it; he felt that it would haunt him ceaselessly through all his future life. He tried to remind himself of the loyalty, the respect, he owed to her, he tried to rouse himself, to cast aside these gloomy reflections; he took up the letter which Bertie had thrown down on the table, and began to read it, half mechanically at first, but with more interest as he went on.

It had no commencement. Celia had been in doubt, perhaps, how to address the man whom she had wronged, and, womanlike, solved the difficulty by plunging straight into the subject. It ran thus:—

“I know that in writing to you now I forfeit all the love you have lavished on me. I know that when you read what I must say to you, you will despise, perhaps curse me, as the destroyer of your happiness; but a confession of the truth is the only reparation I can make you for the cruel wrong I have done you, and I have vowed to make it. I have deceived you pitilessly, mercilessly; I have led you to believe that I loved you more than I would confess. I have fed you with vain hopes; I have sacrificed you to the gratification of my own vanity, as a fancied means to the attainment of the desire of my life. I have repaid all that was generous and loyal in your regard for me by the cruellest treachery, for I have never loved you. I love your brother Guy.

“Despise me, hate me as you will, as you must, but lay all the blame on me, for I alone deserve it. You must hear the truth from me, for you will never hear it from him. I know too well the chivalry of his nature to suppose he would make a woman’s love, a woman’s self-humiliation, the shield to defend him from such reproaches as may be cast upon him through me.

“He has asked me to be his wife from the purest of all motives: to save me from the despair of a life wrecked by a hopeless love. I have striven and waited, and hoped and prayed, that I might gain his love—all in vain—but he, in his

generosity, has saved *me* from such a fate as I have tried to bring upon *you*. Bertie, I can't ask you to forgive me, for I know I never even thought of you, never once cared whether I wrecked your life or not, in the wild desire to attain my own happiness.

"Even the atonement I would make to you now if I could is for *his* sake, because *he* wishes it, and the humiliation that I bring upon myself in making this confession, is the just punishment of my sin.

"I do not really fear for your future as *he* does, because I feel so sure that your love cannot outlive such hard truths as I tell you now, because I know that you will scorn me too much even to hate me long. Forget me if you can. I can ask nothing more of you whom I have so deeply wronged.

"CELIA RAGONI."

The letter dropped from Guy's hand—the confession of her great love for himself touched him with something like remorse.

"Heaven grant that she may not be bitterly disappointed," he thought, sorrowfully conscious of how little he returned it.

"She has told the bare truth, she has made all the reparation she can. I will never reproach her again."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THOUGH most people had left town Parliament was still sitting, and some few families remained until the release of husband or father from the urgent duties of the Upper or Lower House enabled them to seek the repose and retirement of country life.

Among them the Hoares, for Mr. Hoare was a member of

St. Stephen's. A very fussy member, and a very affectionate husband and father, he could only settle the rival claims of affairs political and affairs domestic, by prevailing on his wife to share with him the miseries of fashion-forsaken London; and she made the sacrifice with the feelings of a martyr and the condescending grace of a goddess; for though she knew that every consideration of duty as a leader of fashion required that she should be out of town when every one else was out of town, she was a model wife, and, like Mrs. Micawber, would never desert her husband. Of all the members of her household Kitty Lorton suffered most by this arrangement. She had been ailing and drooping for some time, and now the change in her became very perceptible to the most unobservant eyes. Country-born and bred, accustomed to spend all her days in the open air, she seemed to wither and stifle in the confinement of her new life and the oppressive atmosphere of London.

The horror of her father's death, and the terror she had suffered in her loneliness and misery, had told upon her delicate organization, and little by little her strength seemed to desert her; day by day she grew weaker and paler, and it seemed a harder struggle to fight against the illness that was stealing over her. But those who watched her, and pitied her, and tried their best to help her, knew nothing of the secret grief that was weighing on her mind and undermining her strength; knew nothing of the sleepless nights, the remorseful tears, the sickening doubts, the feverish hopes, that were telling on her, mentally as well as physically.

The regret, the vague remorse, that had come to her, even before her passion had cooled, as Guy Lawrence, reproachful, wounded, and angry, had left her standing under the trees, had gained on her as the days went by.

Doubts whether she had judged him too hastily crept little by little into her mind. Wishes that she had spoken less bitterly—told him why she accused him, and given him a chance of defending himself, changed gradually into self-accusations, terrible regrets, and vain, piteous longings.

She suffered an agony of shame and remorse when she remembered how she had spoken to him, when she thought of how she must appear in his eyes. The longing to speak to him, to ask him for his forgiveness, and then to hide herself away forever out of his sight, grew greater and greater as she got weaker.

At night she would start up out of her feverish sleep, haunted by confused, half-waking dreams. Such strange, terrible dreams they were. Sometimes her father's face, distorted and convulsed with horror and passion, would change into a cold white face in a coffin—Lady Caroline's face, looking up at her with reproachful eyes—and then, somehow, fading slowly and strangely, it seemed to grow like Guy's, and the lips, the dead, drawn lips, would move, and Kitty, waking up, sobbing and crying, shivering in very terror of the darkness, and yet more afraid of sleep which brought such hideous visions, would creep out of bed, and, drawing up the blind, sit and watch until the cold gray dawn chased away the horrible night.

No one knew or imagined *all* she suffered, but it left its traces in her pale face and heavy eyes; and Mrs. Hoare insisted on her seeing the family doctor, a grave, elderly man, who shook his head, called it "nervous debility," and prescribed a mild tonic.

But the tonic did not produce any immediate effect, and Mrs. Hoare was beginning to grow disappointed, and to feel her unlimited faith in the elderly doctor might be shaken, when, one morning at breakfast, she observed a real change for the better in her governess. Miss Lorton had a faint tinge of color in her pale cheeks, the gray shadow under her eyes was less visible than usual, she looked brighter and her smile was less forced, and more frequent. Miss Lorton was cross-examined, "Had she slept?" "Yes; very well towards the morning." "Had she more appetite?" "Oh, yes;" and Mrs. Hoare turned the subject, and mentally congratulated herself on her valuable doctor, and the effect of the tonic.

But Kitty knew better, or might have known, had she con-

sidered the subject; but she was thinking and caring little about her health, and much of other things. A resolution taken and acted upon that very night, was the real cause of the change in her, for it had lifted a load off her mind, and she felt freer and lighter and happier than she had done for many days. At that very moment while Mrs. Hoare was cross-examining her, she was conscious of a letter hidden away in her pocket, all written, sealed, and directed to Guy Lawrence—a letter that was only waiting to be sent until she could get away by herself to post it, for it could not be trusted to any of the servants.

In the dead of the night it had been written; when all the other people in the house were slumbering, she had started up unable to sleep, unable any longer to keep her sorrow and her repentance hidden away in her heart, and in the quiet solemnity of the hour, she had gained courage to do what for days she had yearned to do.

For the remembrance of Guy Lawrence, as he used to be, rose up before her eyes, and compelled her to doubt the evidence which she, in her passion, had believed to be all-sufficient proof of his treachery. The echo of his loving words, his tender looks, haunted her day and night, and almost compelled her to believe in the love he had professed for her.

Stern, grave, cold he might be to others, but to her he had been always kind, tender, and forbearing, even when she had been violent and passionate. That emboldened her to confess to him that she had been wrong, and the resolution to do so once formed, she could not rest until it was acted upon.

Day after day she hoped some chance might bring her in his way, and give her the power of speaking to him, but each day she hoped in vain; and that night her restlessness grew beyond her control, and creeping out of bed she lighted her candle, and, opening her desk, sat down to write to him.

If Guy Lawrence could have been gifted with some sort of second-sight that night, if he could have seen in a vision that little white-robed figure, that small pale face, half hidden in a cloud of floating hair, bent low over the paper, what an agony

of regret he would have endured at a knowledge gained too late, of what might have been. If Kitty Lorton, penning her little, simple, sorrowful confessions, could have known how at that very moment the man she was writing to was pacing up and down his room, with his heart and brain on fire with conflicting love and duty!

But they neither of them knew—neither of them ever would know.

The letter was written—a little letter that said nothing of the love she still felt for him, only confessed that she had been wrong; prayed his forgiveness for her anger and bitterness, and told him why she had doubted him, and that she regretted with all her heart she had been too proud and passionate to tell him at the time; but if it had ever reached Guy Lawrence, and reached him before it was too late—before he had bound himself to another—the unconscious tenderness that lay hidden in every word would have revealed itself to his eyes, and would have brought him to her again, devoted and loving as ever.

Kitty felt happier directly it was written; it seemed to her as if she had been speaking to Guy, as if the load of sorrow that was so hard to bear silently and alone was already lightened. She stole noiselessly back to bed, and with her precious letter safe under her pillow, slept calmly and peacefully till the morning.

All the morning she went about with it in her pocket, only waiting—only waiting for the afternoon to come, that she might be free to go out. And the hours went by, the hours that seemed so slow to her, but yet were bringing her nearer and nearer to a terrible fate.

The luncheon-bell rang, and Kitty descended to the dining-room a little in advance, as it happened, of the children; and as she opened the door she heard Mr. Hoare speaking with unwonted energy.

“It *can't* be true!”

Mr. Hoare was alone in the room with his wife. It seemed as if he had only just come in, for his hat and stick were on the table; he was fidgeting nervously about the room, taking up a

book and putting it down again, moving an ornament, arranging a chair, looking very red and hot, and very discomposed. He turned as the door opened, took up his hat, and moved towards it, then came back and addressed his wife in an audible whisper.

"It is true, and it's disgraceful—a disgrace that reflects on the whole family."

Mrs. Hoare made a warning sign, and looked towards the children; and he left the room, encountering Lily Ransford in the doorway.

"Anything up?" asked that young lady. "You look as if something or somebody had upset your mental equilibrium, Charlie."

But he made no answer, and Mrs. Hoare said nothing of the cause of those words that Kitty had unintentionally overheard. What could they mean? They were spoken so strangely, so excitedly. She tried to forget them, to tell herself she had no right to speculate on other people's affairs, but they would keep recurring to her mind. "It can't be true!" Why should those words haunt her with a vague uneasiness, a dim foreboding of evil? She found herself watching Mrs. Hoare with a curiosity which was by no means diminished by the repressed excitement of her manner.

Mr. Hoare, too, when he returned to the room, was silent and gloomy, and seemed plunged in unpleasant reflections. Lily Ransford's quick glance went from one to the other, and settled finally on her sister.

"Clara, you've got something on your mind—you've got a secret: I can see it in your face; it's no good trying to keep it from me—what is it?" Then in an audible whisper:

"Doesn't your last chignon match, and is *all* that money wasted; or have you and Charlie been having a row, or oh—I have it—Madame Elise has sent in her bill. I don't wonder he scolded; it *was* a staggerer, as Bertie would say—"

"What nonsense you talk, Lily. I really wish you wouldn't indulge in slang: it is so unladylike."

"That's right, Clara, abuse me, it is such a safety-valve to abuse some one when you're out of temper, but I'm not offended; I'll give you my advice all the same. If it's the chignon, change it; if it's Charlie, snub him; if it's Madame Elise, don't pay her."

"Do leave me alone, and mind your own affairs."

"Haven't got any, thank Heaven. I'm an infant—can't be made responsible for my debts, amatory or monetary—"

"You're not an infant, Aunt Lily."

"Yes, my child, a very fine baby for my age too, only just short-coated," with a glance at her short Watteau skirts, "and with a taste for sweets—some more tart, please, Clara. There's the postman; a love-letter for me, bet you sixpence. For me, William?" as the servant entered with a letter on a salver; "oh, bother, only one for Clara. Who's it from?"

But she received no answer. Mrs. Hoare took the letter, and, tearing it open hastily, read it eagerly. Kitty, still watching her, noticed that her face paled suddenly, that she compressed her lips, and the hand which folded up the letter, which seemed but a short one, trembled. Mrs. Hoare looked across to her husband. Their eyes met.

"It is true," she said in a low, emphatic tone.

He shrugged his shoulders without a word. Lily stared at them in undisguised astonishment, and that was all. Luncheon was over, there was no excuse for remaining, and Kitty rose and left the room.

The children went up-stairs, but she turned into the drawing-room to sort some music that Mrs. Hoare had asked her to lay aside for packing. She went about her task very leisurely, with some dim hope that Lily would join her and perhaps let fall some hint that would set at rest the uneasy feeling which so strangely and unreasonably had taken possession of her. It seemed so absurd to trouble herself about what had passed at luncheon. Why should it have anything to do with her—or with Guy? For without reason—utterly without any knowledge, she somehow or other connected Mrs. Hoare's words, looks,

and manner; Mrs. Hoare's letter, with Guy? Was it because all her thoughts were dwelling on him? She tried to think so, and stooped down behind the piano and began turning over the pile of music, with a determination not to worry herself about phantoms, creations of her own troubled mind.

Voices on the staircase, and Mrs. Hoare and Lily entered the inner drawing-room in earnest discussion.

"It's a dreadful blow to me; I couldn't have believed it of him. Other men one might have expected to do such a thing—but he—"

Kitty started up from behind the piano. She knew they did not see her, and she instantly made herself visible.

"I am sorting the music," she said. "Shall I go, if you are talking?"

"Go! why should you go? Continue what you are doing, pray, Miss Lorton. Why should we attempt to conceal what all the world knows by this time?" exclaimed Mrs. Hoare, throwing herself petulantly back into an arm-chair.

"I wouldn't put myself out so much about it, Clara, if I were you," said Lily. "It's very unfortunate, or at least it seems so to us; but it's a *fait accompli*, and it's no use groaning over it."

"How can you be so heartless, so indifferent to every one else's fate but your own? If you can calmly contemplate his ruin, I can't."

"Ruin, Clara! that's a strong word; why should you call it ruin? I, for one, honor him for marrying a woman he loves, whoever she may be."

"Honor him for marrying that painted creature, who night after night exhibits herself half-clothed in the glare of the gas-lights! I'm ashamed of you, Lily; and how can he love *her*? One would have thought no one but a senseless boy would have been entrapped into marrying such a woman as that."

"I suppose he must love her, or why should he marry her? It seems to me, Clara, you take a prejudiced view of the sub-

ject. It's a pity, a great pity, but after all, I dare say she's as good as other women."

"Good? how can she be good? She's an actress."

"Must she necessarily be bad because she's an actress? For Heaven's sake, Clara, be above the hypocritical cant of the people who condemn all actors and actresses to perdition. Why should you speak so mercilessly of them? Aren't there dozens of good women who have chosen that profession, and made themselves famous and respected in it?" cried Lily, her cheeks flushed with indignation.

"Your eloquence is rather wasted, Lily: you know I've no such absurd ideas; but no decent woman would exhibit herself as an actress—"

"Is obliged to do, to suit the taste of those who go to see her. Then all I can say is, if indelicacy reigns behind the foot-lights, it's indelicate to sit before them; if actresses are immodest, those who go to see them, and rave and applaud, and devour them through their lorgnettes, are doubly so; and though they may dress or undress, as the case may be, to please their audience, do they set the fashion, or follow it? Lady Hautton, with the slip of satin round her waist she calls a bodice, would raise a shout of virtuous indignation on the boards, but she is quoted as the 'mode,' and suffers perfect immunity off them."

"You haven't any right to talk as you do; it isn't at all becoming in a girl of your age," responded Mrs. Hoare, with an idea that she was on untenable ground; and there was a momentary pause in the discussion. And all the while Kitty listened in the agony of suspense, possessed by a terrible sickening fear. Each word seemed to have a portentous meaning, and the dread that the next might confirm her horrible anticipation, made her shake and shiver so that she could not hold the music; her face grew white as death; she bent her head and leant against the piano for support; her breath came in faint, labored gasps.

She felt in another moment she must cry out, and ask them

who it was, who it could be that was going to marry an actress. And why should Mrs. Hoare care so much—why should Mr. Hoare speak of a disgrace reflected on them, unless it was some near relation? Was it possible that it was Bertie of whom they were speaking? A feeling of intense relief came over her at the idea; but an instant's reflection convinced her that it could not be. Mrs. Hoare's words and manner made it impossible. Bertie had no power to cause her such extreme vexation, such intense regret, as she had expressed; and if it wasn't Bertie, then who else? Oh, it *couldn't* be! She felt that she wronged Guy Lawrence by the mere thought, and yet the dread that was upon her grew greater. She tried to speak, but her throat and lips were parched, and the words would not come.

Mrs. Hoare, and Lily at some little distance from her, and intent on their own thoughts, never observed her.

"I can't bear to hear you defend her, Lily," said Mrs. Hoare, rousing herself after a moment's silence. "I have seen her, *you* have seen her, times without number; for thanks to the present state of society, one cannot go anywhere without meeting those sort of people; and leaving alone the question of her mode of life, I think there's scarcely a woman in the world who I wouldn't rather see a friend married to."

"You can't tell what she is from just a glimpse of her in the Park, and I'm sure she is very, very beautiful."

"It's a hard, cruel, sensual face. I wouldn't trust a dog to that woman's mercy," cried Mrs. Hoare, passionately. "If poor Aunt Caroline could but know it, she wouldn't rest in her grave. I couldn't have believed it of him; if you had asked me who was the last man in the world to make a foolish, senseless marriage, I should have said—Guy Lawrence." And with a half-repressed sob she raised her handkerchief to her eyes, and went hastily out of the room.

"That's right," said Lily. "Go and have a good cry; it will do you no end of good. I don't know what we women should do if we couldn't cry and drink tea when we're misera-

ble. Hullo! where are you off to, Kitty?" as she caught sight of a black dress disappearing through the farther door. But there was no answer, and Lily Ransford, too lazy to pursue her, caught up a novel, and sank back on the sofa. And Kitty escaped.

Escape was her only thought. For a moment she had stood there, stunned and helpless under the cruel blow which had fallen on her. She felt as if an icy hand had laid itself on her heart and on her brain, and dulled her senses and stopped her breath; but one idea seemed left to her, the necessity to escape unseen and hide herself. With a terrible effort she roused herself, with a terrible effort she controlled her shaking limbs, and with a last effort after self-command compelled herself to move slowly towards the door. Outside—she paused and tried to recover herself; she was afraid she might faint—she felt so strange; *was* it faintness, this strange, numbed feeling, this dull aching in her head, that made everything look so altered and unreal, that made everything seem as if it was receding from her—leaving her alone—alone in the midst of a terrible darkness?

She sat down on the stairs and rested her head against the balustrades. The cold of the iron as it touched her forehead revived her, and after a moment she recovered herself and got up. She ascended the stairs very slowly, very wearily, walking as if she were in a dream. She went into her room, she shut and bolted the door, and sat down, still in the same dreamy way, and looked round her, as if the old familiar things had somehow changed their aspect and grown strange and unreal. She did not cry, or moan, or faint; she sat quite still, only now and then she seemed to catch her breath, as if she were gasping for air, and once or twice she put her hand to her forehead as if to collect her thoughts, or still the aching of her brain.

After a while, still in the same dreamy way, she took out the letter she had in her pocket, and looked long at the address; then she broke the seal, and read it through, very carefully and slowly, and when she had finished it she tore it across, and then

again and again till it was in a hundred pieces. With that same stunned, helpless look on every line of her white face and slight, drooping figure, she sat motionless, and looked with terrible intensity at the torn letter, as if in that little heap of tiny scraps of white paper lay buried every hope of her life.

Utterly worn out in body and mind, it seemed as if the shock which she had received had for the moment deadened all power of sensation in her. Her mind refused to grasp the whole truth, and yet every word she had heard seemed indelibly engraven on her memory, and over and over again she repeated to herself one sentence, carelessly uttered—one sentence wherein lay the cruellest sting of all—"He must love her, or why should he marry her?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.



FORTNIGHT later a girl kept weary vigil through the long, slow hours of a sultry summer's night.

The atmosphere was like a heavy pall, the earth seemed to gasp and faint under some terrible oppression, low mutterings of distant thunder, sudden lurid flashes of light amid the dusky clouds, not a breath of air to stir the ghostly branches of the trees, not a ray of light to break the dark masses of blackest shadow that lay under them—the very night seemed pregnant of some mysterious portent of coming ill.

She—Kitty Lorton—knelt by a low window in a large old-fashioned country house, and with her hands clasped in front of her, and her head resting against the frame, looked out into the darkness.

Rest seemed farther from her than ever that night; her heart and brain were burning with a fire which showed itself in the bright crimson spots on her cheeks, and the dull glow of her heavy eyes.

The apathetic despair that had at first deadened all power of acute sensation in her, had given place to a fever of suspense.

If it was only over. How long must she wait for the death-blow to fall? How long must she shiver and sicken at the thought of it?

If it was only over—then this agony of regret and vain remorse might be stilled. Then—knowing the reality and the greatness of the gulf that lay forever between her and the man she loved—her love might pass away, and with it, her regret and her remorse.

No anger, no indignation against Guy Lawrence, made the thought that she had lost him forever easier to bear. Too late she knew that it was all her own fault. Too late she knew that she had misjudged him utterly, and condemned him unheard. Too late she believed that he really had loved her, and that it was she who in her wickedness had driven him to marrying another woman.

"Oh, God," she moaned, as she buried her head in her hands, and the hot tears burned in her eyes: "if I had not been so blind—so blind—"

Again she dropped her hands and looked out through the mist of tears, far away into the gloomy, lowering sky—looked and looked as if she read her own dark future there. Looked and looked, until her heart ached so sorely with the dreariness of her life, and gasping sobs tore her heaving bosom, and shook her slender drooping figure.

"All my own doing. Why didn't I say one word, one kind word; why didn't I call him back when he left me? All my own doing."

That was the bitterest thought of all; therein lay sorrow's crown of sorrows; the knowledge that all she most longed for had been hers, and she had lost it—thrown it away—sinfully, wilfully. Could she live and bear it? Would it never, never leave her—this maddening recollection, this sickening regret for what might have been?

It seemed to her then that it must be comparatively so easy

for people to accept, with the calmness of a despair which has never been ruffled by hope, the ills which are not the result of their own folly—the ills which come to them in the natural course of their lives.

But to look back and know that two paths had lain before her, the one all bright with the sunshine of happiness and love, the other dark and dreary, and, oh, so lonely—to look back and know that she had chosen the one and left the other—ah ! there lay the misery of it.

“He loved me once, perhaps he loves *her* now. She is so beautiful ; but I did it, I drove him to her—I was so hard and cruel, and taunting ; and she, of course she was loving—how could she help loving him ? ” she sobbed to herself. The hours of that summer night were slowly passing, and still she knelt by the window and watched and waited for the dawn. “If I could only ask him to forgive me!—but I never can. I can never speak to him, never see him any more. Perhaps even now he is—married.

How she shivered and trembled at the word ! Married—and she was enduring, nay, indulging this agony of remorse and love and regret for another woman’s husband. The thought stung her with a terrible pain ; she stretched out her arms with a low cry, as if she would have bridged over the chasm which lay between them.

“Guy, Guy, nevermore, I must never even love you any more.”

For even love had grown to be sin.

Poor little wilful, innocent girl. She unfastened with her small trembling hands a plain gold locket which had lately hung round her neck day and night. She opened it and took out a little torn, crumpled piece of paper. She smoothed it out to look at it once more—only once more. She gazed lovingly at the large writing, the old familiar words,

“Loyal je serai durant ma vie.”

How they seemed to mock her and to laugh at her. She kissed

them passionately again and again: she held the little scrap of paper to her feverish lips as if she could never part from it, and the hot tears rained down her cheeks upon it.

"The only little bit of him left to me—and even that I must give up."

She tore it across again and again—she whispered "good-by, good-by," as though she was parting from her last friend. She scattered the pieces to the winds, and they caught them with a sudden fierce breath and bore them away from her out into the darkness. She strained her eyes to look after them, but they could not pierce the gray, unfathomable mists. She cried and wept, but only the low wail of the rising wind answered her. Stillness and darkness fell on her and on all the sleeping earth.

Suddenly a cold shiver ran through her. A streak of red light broke through the heavy clouds in the eastern sky.

The dawn had broken.

The dawn of Guy Lawrence's wedding day.

The morning came, a dull, gloomy morning, with a gray, changeless sky, and a stifling, poison-tainted atmosphere.

The doors of a large church at the west end of London stood ajar, and such dim rays of daylight as glimmered through the dusty windows of the great, dreary, empty building revealed two or three figures, moving in silent, ghostly procession up the long, deserted aisles, standing before the altar, repeating some words in dim voices, whose low tones seemed to echo in sepulchral whispers through the gloom.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation—"

The congregation consisted of a middle-aged lady, in a stiff silk dress, who was discharging her last duty as "companion," and giving the bride away—with ulterior hopes and visions of a handsome present to be obtained thereby; a pew-opener, who crept mysteriously about, clanking a bunch of keys like an uneasy spirit; and a clerk, with a very big Prayer-book, and a very husky voice.

Even at that solemnest of all solemn moments, the bridegroom could scarcely repress a grim smile at the thought of the congregation.

The clergyman droned through the service; the clerk struggled through the responses; the beautiful bride trembled and blushed; but the grave, quiet face, the deep sorrow-marked eyes of the bridegroom never changed. The strange, powerful words that have made so many hearts throb and beat, fell unheeded on their ears. The woman was so full of her new wonderful happiness, the man so full of his own thoughts—thoughts that had carried him so far away, that he woke with a start to find there was a silence, and they were waiting for him to speak. “I will.” Was it he who uttered the words? It seemed to him as if it was the echo of a far-away voice, not his own, and he, in a sort of trance, was listening to them, it was so unnatural, so unreal. Could he be standing here vowing “to love and to cherish until death” another woman? Could it be that he who had dreamt—Heaven keep him from such dreams now!

The warm, trembling fingers shivered at the touch of his cold hand, the great pleading eyes looked pitifully up into his face—“I, Celia, take thee, Guy, to be my wedded husband.” How the words reproached him! He let her hand drop, and as they knelt down, buried his face in his folded arms, and prayed, as he had never prayed yet, to be forgiven for the sin he was committing. “Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.” Never any more! for through life unto death must those two cleave unto each other, “for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health.”

As Guy Lawrence held his trembling bride in his arms, and looked at the lovely tear-stained face, a strange wild feeling of regret which was almost despair for what he had done, came over him; for even then, with the echo of his own vows ringing in his ears, he fully realized that she whom he had sworn to love he could not love, and that one who was dearer to him than all the world beside was now severed from him hope-

lessly, inexorably. "Celia, my wife, God make me good to you!" And this prayer, uttered in a low tone, with heart-felt earnestness, was Guy Lawrence's greeting to his wife.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BERTIE DEVERELL'S was not a temperament to brood long over troubles that were merely sentimental.

Like most youths of his age, he implicitly believed that the calf-love which had afflicted him, while it lasted, was the truest, noblest, deepest passion that man ever felt for woman; but when it had run its course, abruptly checked in its career by the conviction that he was being fooled and made ridiculous, his *amour propre* came to his rescue, and he began to think that, after all, the grapes were sour; certainly not worth the cost of cutting, while so many good things of this world were easily within his reach.

To be sure the flame had blazed somewhat furiously, fanned as it was by Celia's coquetries; and his self-willed passionate temperament had made him fret and fume rather more than is customary amongst the cynical jeunesse of the nineteenth century; but the thought that he, who prided himself on his knowledge of, and success with, women, had been hoodwinked like the greenest boy, rankled within him, and this blow to his vanity had thus proved fatal to his passion.

But though he ceased to sigh for the love that was dead, or the tendresse rather that was prematurely strangled, he had not forgiven Guy for the part he played in the affair. Bertie's pride was too much wounded not to require the salve of consolation in some form or another, and so he persuaded himself that it was owing to Guy's treachery only that the preference Celia professed to feel for him, Bertie, was not really an existing fact.

All this he thought the morning after his interview with Guy, as he lay stretched on the sofa in his room. Reflection never had a cheering effect upon Bertie—communing with himself, he was tête-à-tête with the gloomiest of companions; his thoughts would turn to the wasted past; or the future, with a forecast of its difficulties, would obtrude upon them. Things had gone all wrong. Bills were falling due; all his turf investments had turned out badly, the greatest “morals” had turned out mistakes, the biggest “pots” had been upset, the merest “flukes” and the most unheard-of accidents had made a difference of thousands to him.

The increasing bustle and excitement of the life he had led gave him little time to brood over these things, for the few blank days his racing engagements allowed him were invariably spent in love scenes with Celia; but Goodwood had closed the season of the turf, and no *affaire du cœur* was on the cards to while away the time; so Bertie, depressed and low, and suffering martyrdom from ennui, as he lay upon his sofa, fell back upon the universal panacea of young men nowadays—drank brandy and soda, and smoked a cigar.

He was beginning to feel the soothing effect of his high-priced cabana, when the door opened and Bentham entered.

“Hullo, my prince of Sybarites,” he said, “you’ve missed your *métier*. You ought to have been a Grand Turk or a guardsman—you do nothing so gracefully. What are these weeds like? You don’t generally smoke bad ’bacca, so I’ll risk one.”

“Smoke a dozen, old fellow; but don’t chaff, I’m rather hipped to-day.”

“Poor fellow, replied Bentham, with mock sympathy, as he arranged himself in an easy chair. “Where does the proverbial shoe pinch? Has the Ducal drained you! or did your opponent ‘mark the king’ oftener than was pleasant last night? or have you been drinking old Phipps’ Burgundy?—worst in Europe, I swear—believe it’s grown on purpose for him. Or has Estelle been—”

Bertie interrupted him.

"Don't speak of her, Bentham. I never wish to hear her name again."

Bentham drew his cigar from his mouth and gave a prolonged whistle.

"Why, Bertie, dear old boy, what's in the wind now? If it isn't a lover's squabble, tell us all about it; but cut it as short as you can."

"No need to cut it short, there's so little to tell."

"Bolted, eh!"

"Not exactly—she's going to be married."

"Married!" cried Bentham, opening his eyes with astonishment. "Nice quiet sort of creature for double harness—who's the man?"

"My brother—Guy."

Bentham uncrossed his legs, bent forward, staring at Bertie with an amazed air, and blew a cloud of smoke from his mouth. "Guy married to Estelle? The devil!"

After a short pause, "But how's this come about?" he continued, with a slight frown; "there's been something like foul play here. How has Lawrence come out of it all?"

The blood mantled into Bertie's face, and his eyes flashed angrily as he made answer: "There's not another man alive that I would tell all this to, Bentham. She has fooled and tricked me. Women of her class generally do when they find it pays—she's no better than the rest; but *he* has betrayed me like a Judas. Preached of sacrifice of self, of brotherly affection, and all that cursed cant, planning all the while the greatest wrong that man can do to man."

And Bertie flung away the end of his cigar, and sat moodily, with his face resting on his hand.

"I tell you what," said Bentham, mixing another soda-and-brandy, "it strikes me you don't quite see this affair in the right light; you rave and fume about this treachery of Guy's, as you are pleased to call it, when really what does it amount to? That he has cut you out in your amourette with Estelle.

There's not another man in London who wouldn't have done the same thing if he had had the chance. The greatest wrong that man can do to man, or woman either, depend upon it, is to ruffle his vanity. You may swindle him, rook him at cards, leg him on the race-course, do him out of thousands, and, though he may speak of his loss, the real sting will be that he has been outwitted. You may run away with your neighbor's wife, and though he may have hated her as the scourge of his life, and cursed the destiny that bound him to her, longing frantically, despairingly, to be free, he will forget the debt he owes you as his deliverer, and hate you. As the destroyer of his honor? Pshaw! no: because his self-conceit is wounded—because a woman has preferred you to him, though he loathed that woman as a noisome serpent."

"It isn't that; I really cared for Celia; I was always thinking of her—picturing a future—"

"Future be hanged! You've grown theatrical, Bertie; cut that—it's bad style. Mean to tell me, if you'd been left in possession, and had married her, that you wouldn't have given all you had to be off your bargain before three months had passed? Of course you would. It isn't the loss of Estelle that piques you now, it's the thought that another man could do you out of her—beat you on your own course. In this sort of race the heaviest-weighted wins; that's about the form of it, and that's the secret of Guy's success. Now give me a liquor. Never preached so much in my life before, give you my word; don't ask me to speak for half an hour." And Bentham took a deep pull at his soda-and-brandy, and subsided into his chair.

Bertie still sat pondering.

"I did like her awfully, Bentham—it's no use denying it—better than anything I had."

"Exactly; because, unlike everything you possessed, *she* was always just beyond your reach. 'The desire dieth when it is obtained,' as the cloak man—what's his name—Raleigh, said; and he was about right. Guy's behaved deuced badly—no doubt of it. A fellow doesn't expect that sort of thing

from his brother. However, if you were a Corsican, or a woman, you needn't wish your vendetta to be in surer hands. By Heaven! what a devil that woman could be."

Bertie made no answer—only contemplated the smoke of his cigar. He was thinking that there was much truth in what Bentham said.

"My visit is rather *à propos*, Bertie," continued Bentham. "I'm going for a yachting cruise—just the thing to pull you round, you know. The surest antidote to love is absence from the object. Change of scene, and all that. A month, coolness; two months, indifference; three months, complete forgetfulness. Come and try it?"

"I think I will. When do you sail?"

"In two or three days—don't matter much. The *Undine* is at Cowes. Charlie Lyall, Gus Vandeleur, Ormsby, of the Coldstreams, and Lawson, are going with us."

"Vandeleur? I thought he was going to marry that Bopkins girl with the snub nose and eighty thousand pounds. What will she do for her *cavalier servant*?"

"Do without him. He prefers *cavalier seul*. I think he wants to get out of it rather. Poor Gus! he was badly pressed, you know—couldn't raise another shilling; the Israelites wouldn't do his paper at any price. Then he made a bad book on the Leger; lame duck altogether; and so Bopkins, *père et fille*, swooped down upon him. Old boy's made a fortune in pickled pork, salt junk, or something nautical—and wants a title for his daughter."

"So poor old Gus was bagged?"

"Yes, like the gonest coon. Old boy didn't seem to see it at first, though—wanted her to marry Sir Titus Gobble, tallow-chandler, knight, and alderman; thought 'My lady' was grander than 'Mrs.,' even with the prefix 'Honorable.' However, the lovely Angelina preferred blue blood to colza oil, strawberry leaves to fourpenny dips; so papa gave in, and beauteous humility gained the day."

A few days later, Bentham's schooner-yacht, the *Undine*,

with all his friends on board, was scudding before the wind under full sail off Ventnor.

"I can understand a man turning pirate," said Ormsby, who was of rather a poetic turn of mind; "the wild, adventurous life, the glorious excitement of all its dangers, the absence of restraint from the trammels of society, the proud sensation that you acknowledge no authority; above all, the feeling of freedom, must have made a man live, when before he only existed."

"I agree with you, Ormsby," said Vandeleur, lying back upon the deck, looking upwards meditatively. "It must have been delightful, no end, to snap your fingers at duns and women—to cruise about without the fear of being hooked and married, as you are burked and robbed, before you have any idea of what has happened."

"Rather awkward when they caught you, though," chimed in Lawson: "there's precious little romance in being hanged. Swinging at a yard-arm is scarcely a proud sensation, or one compatible with the feeling of freedom that Ormsby talks about."

"A man may run his head into a worse noose than a halter," said Vandeleur, gloomily.

"Why, Gus, you talk like a tract," laughed Bertie, settling himself on some cushions on the weather side of Bentham, who was at the tiller. "What's up, eh?—tell us all about it."

"Only don't be too gushing," added Bentham; "don't let your feelings carry you away."

"Here, have a go in at claret-cup," said Ormsby. "Cool your head, you know—raging fires, devouring flames, and all that. Devilish hot tippie, that cup of bliss, I should say! Couldn't you ice it?"

"If you'll give up chaffing, and 'lend me thine ears,' as the poet says, I'll tell you all about it."

After a deep draught from the bright silver tankard, he began:

"I'll call my story 'Love's Young Dream; or, Caught in

the Toils.' Give me a weed, Bertie. No doubt you've all heard of the approaching nuptials between my humble self and Miss Angelina Bopkins. I won't dwell on the lady's attractions; suffice it to say that they lay in her figure."

("Eighty thousand pounds, wasn't it?" put in Bentham, coolly.)

"Exactly so; rather than in any special beauty of face or form. I was strongly advised to marry, especially by my creditors. It was time that I settled, they said. Persuaded that they were serious, I considered the situation. There were three settlements open to me—a settlement with my creditors, Angelina's marriage settlements, or the settlement in Whitecross Street. I preferred the bonds of matrimony to those of a spunging-house—they are easier broken; so I went in for Angelina. She smiled upon me; papa consented; the day was fixed; the trousseau was ordered, and old Time lagged on with sluggard steps—"

"Oh, cut that, Gus," groaned Ormsby. "Stick to Angelina."

"Of course he will," laughed Bentham, "till death doth them part."

"Don't interrupt," said Vandeleur. "We were full-blown *engagés*. Ugh! the life I led! Morning concerts in stifling rooms, where eighteen-stone chaperones melted visibly, and highly-chignoned music-mad young ladies came to hear 'that darling Santley,' or that 'sweet Mongini;' or crowded flower-shows, where well-dressed people hustled each other like London roughs. Oh, the fetch-and-carry time I had of it!"

"Poor old man!" said Bertie, with an air of mock commiseration. "Drop a tear, if it'll relieve you. We'll spare your feelings."

"Well, this sort of thing went on some time. I was thoroughly docile; my spirit was crushed—and so I gave great satisfaction. Angelina seemed proud of her conquest, and didn't forget to lead me vanquished before the multitude."

"What did your people say to it all, Gus?"

"Oh, the gov'nor kicked a good deal—always called old Bopkins 'the tallow-man,' talked of a stain on the escutcheon—a grease-spot my brother Dick called it, that would never come out. But as I was always considered the scamp of the family, they soon ceased to trouble themselves about it. My old aunt, Lady Cicely Plantagenet, behaved awfully well; thought it wasn't such a bad thing, after all; and as my own people wouldn't receive the Bopkinses, offered to take them up herself."

Vandeleur paused to take another drink of claret-cup, then continued :

"You know my aunt, Bentham—the most ultra-refined old dame alive. Nothing else like her since the last century. We were all at Paris in the spring. Aunt Cicely had some people to dinner, the De Courcys, Tom Berkeley from the Embassy, and one or two others, including Bopkins and his daughter. At dinner a *vol-au-vent* was served; there was something new about it—a great invention of the *chef's*, who, knowing that some at least of the guests were noted gourmets, was anxious that it should pass the ordeal of their criticism. It was a great success: De Courcy passed an elaborate judgement upon it, Berkeley vowed he would never rest until the Embassy had got the recipe, even old Bopkins thought it not so bad for a 'kickshaw' dish. 'What is your opinion of it, Miss Bopkins,' asked Lady Cicely. 'My opinion, Lady Cicely?' she replied, 'oh, I think it's very nice, but not half so good as *tripe and onions*.' Imagine the consternation of every one; old De Courcy dropped his knife and fork, stuck his eye-glass in his eye, and stared open-mouthed at her. Berkeley turned his head to speak to Blanche de Courcy, but I saw them both struggle to suppress a titter. Lady Cicely cast one look of consternation at me that made the blood rush to my temples. I would have been grateful if the floor had opened and swallowed me. Never shall I forget the torture of that moment! The next day I picked a quarrel with Angelina; it was a mean thing to do, I know, but what else could be done? I wrote a

note saying that I thought our engagement had better end, as our *tastes* were different—and then I bolted ;” and Vandeleur applied himself again to the claret-cup.

“By George, what an escape !” said Ormsby, in a serious voice.

“What did they do ?” asked Bentham.

“Heaven knows. I haven’t shown myself much since ; hang me if I’m not afraid ; if some dun doesn’t catch me some woman will, and so I mean to keep clear of both. Hand over another weed.”

Very pleasantly the time passed on board the *Undine*. A week round the south-west coast, and then up channel, and a cruise to Norway and back filled up the time to the first of September, on which day Bertie was due at Erlesmere for the shooting. The constant change of scene, the genial society, and the excitement of this yachting expedition wrought a great change in him. Bentham was right when he foretold that time and absence would be fatal to any lingering affection that Bertie might cherish for Estelle.

He was much depressed at times it is true, and then he would swallow brandy, glass after glass, until Bentham looked grave, although as host he could not well remonstrate. Bertie’s spirits rose with stimulants, and he joined heart and soul in the rollicking bohemianism of the life, becoming more and more convinced that he had nothing to regret ; that the loss of freedom, the social restraint of married life, were sacrifices far too great to offer on the hymeneal altar ; that no bait, however tempting, that no prize, however dazzling, should induce a man to throw away his liberty.

But as he thought all this, day after day, slowly but surely he was becoming more enslaved to a tyrant more insatiable, more fatal to freedom of thought and action, than the most exacting mistress that ever lived—to the demon drink.

It was a warm September night at Erlesmere—Bertie and his friends were in the stately old drawing-room, lounging in-

dolently on couches, or seated at card-tables, which had been introduced.

There had been a battue that day—a sickening slaughter of the innocents; for the birds, unmolested during the previous season, had grown quite tame, and allowed themselves unsuspectingly to be driven to their fate. Everybody seemed pleased with his day's sport. Champagne passed freely; the talk grew louder and more general, and the play became higher and more reckless.

A small group had collected round one of the card-tables where Bertie and a man called Peyton were playing *écarté*.

The game had not lost any of its old fascination for Bertie, especially as he prided himself on his skill at it. But his opponent was worthy of his mettle, for a cooler, more finished *écarté* player than Morley Peyton never turned a king.

Luck was dead against Bertie—provokingly so: and he was beginning to show annoyance—a fatal failing in a card-player. Considerable sums had been staked, most of the lookers-on were anxious to back the winning seat, and Bertie, with his natural recklessness, and believing that the luck must turn, took bet after bet, thinking that by a few lucky *coups* he might regain his losses.

"There's no playing against you to-night, Peyton," he said, as his opponent scored another game; "that makes a hundred and twenty—play you one more game for fifty."

"Done!" said Peyton.

"Same again, Vandeleur?" asked Bertie.

"Yes, of course," drawled Gus, taking a cigarette from his mouth.

"You're rash to back yourself, Deverell," said Ormsby, sauntering up: "lucky in love, unlucky at play; and if a woman's eyes can speak, that fair rustic I saw you with this morning was playing Marguerite to your Faust.

Bertie smiled.

"What's that, Ormsby?" cried Vandeleur. "A woman? Didn't know there was such a thing down here."

"Who was she, Bertie?" asked Bentham. "Some fair Rosamond of yours, who had strayed away from her clematis-clad bower? Some golden-haired, peach-bloomed, bright-eyed Daphne, as the novels have it; or some broad-hoofed, rosy-cheeked, snub-nosed dairy-maid?"

"Some covey you have flushed in the Erlesmere preserves, eh, Bertie?" chimed in Lyall: "keep an eye on Ormsby, or he'll poach your game."

"By the bye, speaking of poachers," said Lawson, who had just woke up from a doze, "Griffiths, your under-keeper tells me that, thanks to your brother Guy's *laissez aller* ways, Erlesmere is infested with them. Why don't you do something in the matter?"

"Don't speak to me now, there's a good fellow," replied Bertie, as he played a card.

"What was that, Lawson?" asked Bentham, turning to him.

"Only that there are nine or ten ruffians who make a living out of Lawrence's pheasants; bag 'em no end. Send cart-loads to market."

"The deuce!"

"It seems that there's a fellow at the head of them called Smithers—a farmer in the village."

A burst of exclamations which rose from the group at the card-table interrupted Lawson. "Well played, Bertie; near thing, by Jove!" from all. "Lucky you played the club;" and every one became absorbed in the game.

"Your deal, Peyton; bar a king being turned, I'll back myself for a pony."

"Put it down, by all means."

"Again?" asked Brandon.

"Yes," replied Bertie, and the bet was booked several times over.

The cards were dealt. Bertie held the queen, another trump, two kings, and a ten. He stood on his hand. Peyton had knave, ten, and seven of trumps, a small card, and an ace.

The play went on. They were two tricks each, Bertie to play; his card was the ten of hearts, Peyton's was the ace; he took the trick, and won the game.

"'Gad! what luck!" "Hard lines, by George!" "Never saw anything like it!" Such ejaculations followed. Bertie bit his lip to suppress his annoyance. He knew he had lost heavy sums on the evening—much heavier than he could really afford to pay; but beyond a slight paleness, and an almost imperceptible tremor of his hand as he lifted a tumbler of brandy-and-seltzer to his lips, he made no outward sign.

"I've had enough of it to-night," he said, rising from the table; "you fellows can tell me what I owe you, I suppose? Haven't kept account. What's the time?"

"Half-past three," yawned Lawson; "and as we are going to shoot through Palmer's Spinnies to-morrow, I vote we turn in."

"Well thought of, Lawson," laughed Ormsby, slapping him on the shoulder; "you're the only man here who ever thinks of going to bed, and if it weren't for you, by George! I believe we should forget the blessed haven of rest altogether—never press a pillow at all."

Bertie had gone to his room. He felt giddy; his head was fevered with excitement and drink. So opening his window, he drew up a lounging-chair, and throwing himself into it, lighted a cigarette, and looked out into the night.

Night! It was morning rather, and the dark coppices of the home-park stood out in strong relief against the cold gray sky. The freshness of the air seemed to reinvigorate his jaded senses, and the sweet perfume of the dew-laden flowers beneath his window seemed to tempt him to wander amongst them.

Donning a thick shooting-jacket, he descended the stairs and went out. He sauntered on and on, thinking—as all men think in the stillness of solitude—of his past, present, and future, striving to shake off the depression which the thought of his embarrassments caused him, feeling now and then a pang of remorse at his ill-requital of Guy's generosity.

"Heaven knows what I should have done without him!" he thought; "he has always paid my debts without a murmur—treated me devilish handsomely—there's not a doubt about it. Gives me *carte blanche* here, so that I can almost fancy the place is my own. But there's that affair of Celia's—" and he paused a moment in his thoughts—"after all, I wonder whether he really did it to save me from a scrape, as he said he did? Guy never told a lie to any man, and I almost begin to think that I'm better out of it. What a deuce of a mess I'm in with money matters too; if Guy doesn't give me a leg up—" His reflections were cut short by the report of a gun that sounded clearly and loudly in the still morning air, not more than sixty or eighty yards from him. He had wandered into the thickest of the coppice, where the trees and underwood impeded every step. Bertie stopped suddenly, and an angry frown settled on his face.

"Those poaching scoundrels!" he muttered.

He pushed on through the straggling furze till at last he heard the sound of broken branches on the further side of a small open space completely surrounded by closely growing trees.

Concealing himself behind a broad-trunked elm, Bertie waited. The next moment the thickly entwined saplings were pushed aside and a man came into view. He was a tall, broad-shouldered, powerfully built fellow of forty or thereabouts, with a villanous-looking head set on a thick bull-dog throat. He was dressed in a common blackened suit of fustian and a hare-skin peakless cap. A ragged shirt left unbuttoned, and a yellow silk handkerchief, very much begrimed, was tied loosely, so as to bare his brawny throat. Altogether he was the type of low ruffianism—as ill-conditioned a looking brute as ever ginned a hare.

As he stepped out into the open space he held in one hand a double-barrelled gun, in the other a pheasant. He had thrown the bird on the ground, and was about to load the fowling-piece, when Bertie stood before him.

"Give me that gun."

There was a calm determination in Bertie's voice that was scarcely habitual to him.

The poacher stepped back a pace, then leaning on the muzzle of his piece and coolly surveying Bertie, he answered insolently, "Thank ye; if it's all the same, I'd rather keep it."

A frown gathered on Bertie's face.

"Do you know who I am?—I should imagine not."

"Oh yes, I know you well enough—you're Mister Dev'rell from the 'ouse yonder."

"Then you know you're poaching."

"Poaching be damned! Pheasants were meant for one man as much as another. You swells keep 'em for the fun of shooting 'em, when poor devils like me mustn't take 'em for the sake of food—no, damn yer, though we're starving. One man's as good as another, and—"

"Silence," cried Bertie, in a loud, imperious tone that cowed the fellow, ruffian though he was. "You shall answer for this, I promise you. For the present give me that gun and bird."

"Come and take 'em," and throwing the fowling-piece by the side of the pheasant, he proceeded to take off his coat and roll up his shirt-sleeves.

"I will."

To glance at the two men, the chances of a hand-to-hand fight seemed fearfully disproportionate. One the picture of brutal strength, the other with his elegant, slimly built figure, his small white hands, and his Antinous-like head, looking like a David about to encounter a Goliath, or an Adonis standing defiantly before a Hercules. But a practised eye would have seen much power in Bertie's seemingly delicate figure. His great breadth of shoulder; the development of the muscles by constant exercise in field sports, which his short course of dissipation had not yet destroyed; and the cold, proud look of scorn that showed the dogged courage of his race that would never know defeat.

Bertie, like all young men of his order, had gone through the usual pugilistic training at Eton, and in the inevitable water-

side encounters had come victorious from many hard-fought battles against terrific odds.

As he put himself in attitude, his head well back, his left arm straightened, his eyes flashing, a supercilious, confident smile on his lips, but a cruel-looking frown on his brow, he looked worthy to do battle even against the brute beast he was about to grapple.

The poacher attacked him, hitting furiously right and left, intending to make short work of his antagonist, whom he evidently scorned; but finding his blows did not reach home, with an angry growl he threw out his fist like a sledge-hammer, aiming at Bertie's head; but he had held his opponent too cheaply, for Bertie, stepping quickly on one side, planted his fist with all his force behind the fellow's left ear, as he staggered forward with the impetus of his blow, bringing him down as if he had been shot.

The man got up, gave a snort of passion, and with a fierce oath rushed furiously at Bertie. The brutal ferocity of the ruffian was now completely aroused, and he struck out blindly with all his force. But as he grew wilder, Bertie became more cool, and though blood was pouring freely from the poacher's face, his antagonist showed no greater signs of punishment than a slight cut on the upper lip.

Bertie now saw that it was time to deal the *coup de grace*; so, altering his tactics, and forcing the fighting for the first time, he feigned with his left, and as the fellow lifted his guard, threw out his right with all his force, landing on the poacher's brawny throat with a sickening thud, and bringing him down like a felled ox. He lay for a few moments as if he were dead, then opened his eyes and looked wildly about him, until catching sight of Bertie, he raised himself to a sitting posture.

"You're a game 'un, by G— you are!" he growled, as he tore off his handkerchief and tried to stanch the blood that was flowing from his nose and mouth. "There's not another man in Sloughborough could 'a chawed me up as you 'ave. Now *what are you going to do with me?*" And getting up, he

stood in a dogged, sullen manner before Bertie. Bertie was of far too indolent a nature to relish the prospect of dancing attendance on an Assize Court as prosecutor in a poaching case. Moreover, he considered the man had received sufficient punishment already.

"If I let you off, will you promise never to poach again?"

The man's face brightened.

"Let me off, Mr. Dev'rell, and I'll never poach again; strike me dead, if I do!"

There was something in the man's tone that made Bertie believe him.

"I'll take your word; but remember for the future that a man's game is as much his property, and should be held as sacred by others, as anything he has. Now go." And Bertie waved his hand with a commanding gesture, and turned on his heel.

"Let me speak to you a moment, sir?"

Bertie turned and looked at the man. The sullenness had left him, and a look of indignation gleamed in his eyes.

"What do you want with me?"

"You say that a man's game is his property—the birds that fly about wild-like—and that they should be 'eld sacred—that means that nobody shouldn't touch 'em, I suppose? Now, sir, what about a man's daughter—his child that he fed and brought up from a baby—ain't she his property? Has anybody else the right to rob him of her? Is a pheasant or a partridge or a hare of more account than a woman? Tell me that, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this, Mister Dev'rell," replied the poacher with angry vehemence, clinching his huge fist and bringing it down violently in his open palm—"that some infernal villain is trying to rob me of my girl—my only child, my little Rosie, curse him!—and it's one of your friends too—one of them swells up at the 'ouse. If he comes within the reach of my arm, God 'elp him; for I'd brain him with my sledge-ammer as I would a dog that had bit me."

Where is the man so utterly debased that no spark of goodness exists in him? It may be hidden, almost extinguished, by the rough hard incrustations of depravity—it may be never kindled, but though none may dream of its existence, though none may see its outward signs, depend upon it it is there.

This man, ruffian though he was, loved his bright-eyed, motherless child with a tenderness that seemed to give the lie to his brutal nature—that seemed almost to ennoble him as he stood there swearing vengeance on the man who would do her wrong.

“What is your name?”

“Smithers—Bob Smithers, farrier; and my little girl is Rosie Smithers—the rose of Sloughborough, as the neighbors call her.”

Bertie shrugged his shoulders haughtily.

“I can’t concern myself about your domestic affairs—you’ll do what you please in such matters. But for the future remember to keep out of Erlesmere—your next visit will probably lead to transportation,” and turning on his heel he sauntered slowly back toward the house.

“Rosie’s father,” he muttered as he once more regained his room; “*tant mieux*—if anything did come of it, I hold him in my grip at all events.”

CHAPTER XXX.

LIFE was very pleasant at Erlesmere. Long days amongst the “rocketers,” luncheons under the beeches, amongst the sweet-scented thyme and the wild-growing ferns, with the *sauce piquante* of ravenous appetites, and the exhilarating addition of champagne cup. Later on, mornings with the fox-hounds,—cub-hunting, afternoons in the billiard-room, and evenings at *écarté*, *lansquenét*, or whist.

Liberty reigned supreme, and this it was that made things so enjoyable. Dinner was the only formal meal, and even then the absence of one or two of the party occasioned little or no remark; they had run up to London perhaps, or driven over to some neighboring town—nobody knew exactly—nobody cared in the least.

And so it was that Bertie's frequent absence passed unnoticed. Once or twice he had been seen, and not alone, sauntering through some distant coppice in the home-park; but a rustic gallantry was such an ordinary occurrence to men of his set, that beyond the usual "chaff" and somewhat dubious insinuations to which it sometimes led, no one troubled himself about the movements of his host.

And so days and weeks passed on. The hunting season had commenced, and as two or three packs met within easy distance of Erlesmere, most of Bertie's friends accepted his invitation to remain, by no means anxious to quit such quarters. Bertie went up to town and remained there for several days—detained on business, he said. Very urgent business he found it to be—for creditors will not be always satisfied with promises—but his absence made little difference, and was scarcely remarked amongst them.

It was the day after his return.

Lawson, Vandeleur, and Lyall were "gunning," Bertie and the others in the billiard-room, playing pool.

"Going to shoot to-morrow, Bertie?" asked Ormsby, throwing himself on a lounge after making his stroke.

"Oh no; by the bye, Woodthorpe sent over to say there'll be a private meet at Bingley woods. Southdown, Billy Delacour, and the De Vere girls, and a lot of people from Cheshurst are going—rather good fun, I expect."

"And hard riding too, if Connie De Vere's in the field. She's 'a hard 'un to follow, a bad 'un to beat,' as the song says. I'm glad Sir Douglas is fit again. What shall you ride, Bertie?"

"Bonnie Belle."

"You mean to be in the first flight then: that Bonnie Belle's a splendid mare. By the way, didn't you buy her of Tommy White?"

"Yes, gave two hundred for her, and she's worth it every shilling. She's as good as Rattlesnake, without his temper. I shall find her rather fresh though, I expect."

Then as Vandeleur and Lyall appeared at the garden door, "Hallo, you fellows! what sport? where's Lawson?"

"Hasn't he turned up?" asked Vandeleur, seizing a Moselle cup, and taking a deep draught.

"No."

"Don't know anything about him then. I left him beating a turnip-field for partridges. Isn't it nearly dinner-time? I'm awfully hungry!"

A few minutes later a view halloa sounded from the lawn, and the next moment Lawson appeared.

"Thought he wouldn't miss feeding-time," said Bentham, with a laugh. "What's made you so late, Lawson?"

"I've had an adventure," answered Lawson, as he threw himself full length on a cushioned bench that was fitted round the room. "A real romance and mystery sort of affair."

"The deuce you have!"

"Yes, quite melodramatic—give you my honor. I'll tell you how it was. I had come a short cut, and was just breaking cover from Cotteswold Spinnies when I saw a man dodging behind the trees; he hadn't heard me coming, so I watched him. Leaning against a tree he looked in the direction of the house a few minutes, then muttering something I could not catch, shook his clinched fist at it, and turning on his heel began to walk away."

By this time all were listening to Lawson's recital.

"He was up to no good, of course, so as he approached I stood before him. 'Who are you, and what do you want here?' I said. 'My name's Bob Smithers,' he said, folding his arms and glaring in my face. 'Now you can guess what I

want.' 'Unless you want transportation as a poacher I am quite at a loss,' I answered. When I said this the fellow positively walked up and looked me in the face, scowling like the very deuce. 'When is *he* coming back?' he said, pointing to the house; 'you know who I mean. I'll make sure of him, if I swing for it; so let him look to himself, damn him.' And turning abruptly he hurried away."

"What the deuce was he driving at?" said Ormsby, through a cloud of tobacco smoke.

"Can't say, exactly," continued Lawson; "for a moment I stood quite still—took my breath away, I assure you. Then I thought I'd follow the fellow and find out what it all meant; but it was of no use, he had disappeared. I couldn't find him anywhere."

"The brute was vowing vengeance for his thrashing," said Lyall. "Tell you what, Bertie," he added, "better look out for squalls, *mon ami*; those scoundrels sometimes keep their word, and a blow from a bludgeon, or a 'pot' shot from behind a tree wouldn't be a pleasant dénouement to this romance of Lawson's. Well played, Bentham! A sovereign red divides!"

And so the topic was dismissed, and not alluded to again that evening.

The clock in the old ivy-grown tower had just tolled one, awakening no echo in the still, clear night. All had retired early, in anticipation of the morning's meet at Bingley woods, a good fourteen miles from Erlesmere, and Bertie sat in his room, smoking a cigar, and reading some newly published novel.

But though he held the book open before him, his thoughts would continually wander away from its pages.

"What could the scoundrel mean? Pshaw! empty threat, nothing more. Suppose he's heard of my little walks with Rosie. What if he has? There's no sin in talking to a pretty girl, and there's no harm done—more thanks to her, by the

bye, than to me. Who would have given the little thing credit for so much prudery? It was as well that Lawson and those other fellows set it down to the poaching affair—it wouldn't do to tell them about her—they would all be running after her. Poor little Rosie! how pretty she is, with her laughing blue eyes, how innocent, how good! How anxious she will be to see me again—dare say she wonders what has become of me. I'll look her up to-morrow I think, and then—and then—”

And then his reflections made him drowsy, the book dropped from his hand, extinguishing the candle, and he fell asleep.

The clock chimed half-past two, and Bertie woke with a start, shivering with cold in that dark room, for a moment unconscious where he was. Rising from his chair he was about to strike a light, when suddenly he started—there was an oppressive smell of burning wood, and he was dimly conscious that the room was filling with smoke. Hastily lighting his candle, he rushed out and tore down the old oaken staircase. The smell of burning became stronger and stronger; smoke was rolling along the corridor from the direction of the library. Never pausing for a moment, Bertie sped on, and seizing the door, tore it open; but he staggered back at the sight that presented itself. The room was in flames. On the centre of the floor was a black patch of charred straw, that clearly showed the origin of the fire. It was the work of an incendiary; so well had the miscreant done his work too, that already the flames had taken firm hold of the room; the curtains and everything inflammable were ablaze. It was evident that in a few minutes the whole place would be a raging fire.

Not a second was to be lost—Bertie saw that at a glance. Rushing into the hall, he seized the dinner-bell which stood there, and rang it lustily, shouting loudly for help at the same time. In a moment everything was in a state of uproar—half-clad figures rushed frantically about, white-robed maid-servants screaming with terror, as they caught sight of the thick volumes of smoke that rolled through the open door of the

staircase; everybody shouting directions and making a noise that added to the confusion.

Bertie paused only a moment to cast one look at the flames, then seeing that nothing could be done to arrest their progress, and being the only one dressed, rushed out of the house to seek extraneous help.

There were fire-engines at Sloughborough, but that was six miles by the road from Erlesmere—there was a shorter cut across the fields, but it was over a stiff line of country and an awkward flight even when following fox-hounds. But Bertie did not hesitate; the greatest dangers, the most imminent personal risks had no terror for him, and his great physical courage stood him in good stead now, for it kept his brain cool, and he acted with judgment, exciting as the moment was.

Rushing to the stables, he opened the door and entered. In a loose box, on the panels of which her name was emblazoned in letters of gold, stood Bonnie Belle in all the majestic dignity of a thoroughbred crack, on a straw bed that would have made many a pauper envious, and carefully wrapped in clothing embroidered with her owner's monogram.

Bertie hastily struck a fusee that he had in his pocket and lighted a stable lantern; then looking about him, he saw a pair of groom's spurs hanging on a nail. He strapped one on and then turned to the mare.

Bonnie Belle knew his voice, and so submitted to her nocturnal toilet with a very good grace.

Bertie was so well versed in all the mysteries of stable craft, that a very few minutes sufficed for him to put a saddle and bridle on her and lead her out of the stables.

Very beautiful she looked—as far as she could be seen in the gloom—the pink of condition, her coat shining like satin in the moonlight; but Bertie did not stay to contemplate her. Vaulting into the saddle, he rode off, out of the stable yard, down the avenue, through the park gates, and into the road. He turned his head to take one last look at the burning Hall, and then pressed on.

Coming to a gap in the roadside hedge, he burst through it, and turned the mare's head in a direct line to Sloughborough.

And now the gallant mare nobly answers the call that Bertie makes upon her, skimming the ground at a terrific pace, as though she knows how much depends upon her speed! She seems almost to fly in her mad gallop as she strides over ridge and furrow, grass-field and stubble; so tremendous is the pace that the air seems to brush Bertie's cheeks like a cold wind as she tears along. Away they go like the legendary Herne on his phantom steed, and horse and rider seem to share the excitement of their nocturnal flight. Away, over hedge and ditch, water and timber, the gallant brute clearing every obstacle without a pause in her magnificent stride. Now the faint sound of a distant shout is wafted to Bertie on the still night air, and as he guesses that it tells of some fresh havoc that the flames are doing, he presses his spur to the rowel in the brave mare's flanks, as if her splendid pace seemed sluggish to his impatience.

On they gallop, madly, the owls and bats circling round them as they speed across the moonlit fields. Now flying an "oxer," now breasting a hedge from which the feathered occupants fly out with an unearthly caw or screech that gives both horse and rider a weird-like air. Strange they look, tearing across country at that fearful pace; Bertie, bare-headed, his pale face looking paler in the blue-tinted moonlight, coaxing and urging his foam-flecked steed. And now, as they reach the crest of a hill, the spire of Sloughborough church is seen standing in distinct relief against the clear blue sky; but not a light or sign of life is visible at so late an hour in the staid and sober-minded little town. There is not far to go now: another mile and Bertie will draw reign at the Sloughborough engine-house.

Away he gallops, the gallant mare beginning to show slight signs of the terrific pace; and now a dark obstacle appears before them, becoming more distinct as they approach, and proving to be a stiffly-grown blackthorn fence, with a five-foot

"yawner" on each side. Bertie casts a hasty glance to left and right, but no gate or gap shows an opening. A few more strides, and sitting down firmly in his saddle, he lifts Bonnie Belle to the leap; her mettle is up, and she rises like a bird, clearing everything. Away again across two more fields, along a short level road, and into the town, the mare's iron hoofs sounding with a ringing clatter on the stones; another minute, and Bertie draws rein outside the engine-house. The man on duty is asleep. A fire at Sloughborough is such an unusual occurrence that when he wakes with a start at the continual ringing of the sonorous bell, he rubs his eyes for a moment in bewildered astonishment.

Bertie's impatient shouts, however, soon bring him to his senses, and after opening the gates and hearing that Erlesmere is on fire, he speedily summons his companions, and in a few minutes the bright red engine, with its blazing lamps and its helmeted firemen, is thundering out of Sloughborough. But Bertie has gone before them, taking the same cross-country line, the lurid glare in the distance showing him the direction; for the burning Hall may now be seen for miles round, reddening the sky and making it look like the reflected sunlight of early dawn.

Bertie was within half a mile of home, and was galloping at full speed down a narrow lane, when suddenly a man sprung out of a coppice that skirted it on one side, and placed himself in his path. So sudden, so unexpected was the apparition, that the mare swerved and then reared on her haunches, almost throwing Bertie from the saddle.

The man's face was turned to the moonlight. Bertie easily recognized him—it was Smithers. A look of savage exultation gleamed in his eyes, as he motioned Bertie to stop.

"Not so fast, Mr. Dev'rell," he cried with an oath. "Me and you've got a score to settle to-night."

Bertie shook the reins to press past him.

"Stand aside, fellow," he shouted, "if you don't wish to be ridden over."

But the man sprang forward and seized the mare's head.

"No, no: you must listen to me. Look ye 'there,'" and he turned and pointed to the blazing Hall. "Before to-morrow there'll only be ruins where your fine house stood. What do you think of that, eh? Ah! you begin to grind your teeth and look savage now. Ha! ha! that's better!"

"What do you mean, you scoundrel?"

"Mean?" and he yelled the words rather than spoke them. "Mean? why, that I did that little job for you! I set the Hall on fire!"

"You?"

"Yes, me!" and he glared with a look of fiendish desperation. "You know what I did it for, curse you! You've taken away my poor little gal. You know that she went away two or three days ago, and ain't been heard on since. Will you tell me it wasn't with you? What have you done with her—where have you taken her? You know all about it fast enough. I'll take my oath you've been all laughing about it and thinking it a good joke—you and your fine friends up there—cowardly hounds! May they burn like rats in a hole! A good joke to send her to hell—that's what you think it!"

The man paused for a moment, exhausted by his fury. Bertie's face grew white as death.

"You dare to tell me that this is your doing! What do I know of your daughter? What has it to do with me whether she has left you or not? By Heaven! you shall answer for this!"

"Do ye expect me to believe them lies?" interrupted the man with a hoarse laugh. "You as went away the same time as she did—you as was always a talking and a fooling of her—more shame to them as told me nothing of it till it were too late—not too late to pay yer off though! I swore I'd do it. Ay! yer may lag me for it and get me a lifer if yer can. I don't care—what's the odds now, yer——"

Blind with passion, Bertie leant forward and raised his whip, but the man letting go his hold of the reins with a

sudden jerk which caused the mare to swerve, sprang into the coppice and escaped the blow. For a moment Bertie tried to follow, but the brushwood and low growing trees made it impossible to do so on horseback. Should he leave his horse, and following on foot endeavor to prevent the man's escape? He paused, irresolute. A hundred thoughts came rushing into his head. What could he say to Guy about this fire? He dreaded meeting him, for he knew how dear the old house was to him; but Guy was just, and however great his grief might be he would not blame him for that which was the result of an accident, and caused by no fault of his. But what if Guy knew all? He felt that he could not bear to see him, and tell him that this fire was caused, however indirectly, through his own folly.

True, he knew nothing of Rosie's absence. She was safe as far as he knew. But if the poacher were tried, and the girl perhaps cross-examined by some shrewd attorney, it might come out that that was due rather to her virtue than to his principle.

And Guy would blame him—would know that another great disaster had been caused by his shortcomings. Better to let the man go than to let Guy think that. After all, what was to be gained by his conviction?

Weakly hesitating, feeling that it was impossible to take the blame in any way on himself, Bertie lost all chance, if he ever had any, of preventing Smithers' escape. After peering vainly for any trace of him through the darkness of the coppice, he gave up all idea of following him, and turning the mare's head, galloped on towards the burning Hall.

A terrible sight for him when he dismounted on the lawn! The house was one mass of flame, for the fire had made terrible progress while he had been away, in spite of all the efforts of his friends and the crowd of villagers that had collected since the alarm was given. There was plenty of water to be had, and no lack of heroic efforts to turn it to account; Bertie's friends, with the contempt for danger that generally goes with

dilettanteism, setting an example that many of the bolder villagers followed. But though Bentham, Ormsby, and the others risked death from suffocation, flames, and falls from dizzy heights, the bucketfuls of water that they poured on the burning mass had no effect, and room after room caught fire until the whole became one enormous blaze.

The engine had not come up yet, but its gleaming lamps could be seen winding through the lanes like fire-flies shining through the darkness. In a few minutes it would be on the scene, but too late, alas! to save the fine old mansion from its doom.

Bertie saw that nothing could be done, that all human efforts would be fruitless, and so he stood with the others, looking on, waiting for the end.

It was terrible work watching the old home in its downfall, seeing all its cherished relics swallowed by the flames, without the power to snatch them from destruction. An awful sight, sublime in its grandeur;—the fierce flames as they rushed upwards encircling the tottering rafters, devouring all that came within their deadly embrace.

Suddenly, a puff of wind dispersed the smoke, and Bertie saw the portrait of his mother, a splendid picture by Watts, hanging in the drawing-room, untouched by the fire, as if contemptuous of the flames. His pulse quickened, and his heart leapt wildly, as the thought came to him that it might be saved; but before an effort could be made the canvas was in a blaze, and all that remained was the burning frame. And then the shouts of the firemen sounded above the roar of the flames and the din of the crowd, as the engine came thundering up the avenue. No time was lost, the hose was fixed, and a dozen sturdy laborers began to pump with all their strength and will.

The water made a hissing, cracking noise as it fell upon the burning mass, and clouds of smoke rolled upward in dense black columns; but the flames rose higher and higher, fiercer and fiercer, as if defying the power of their antagonistic element. The ceilings one by one fell in, and the roof became

exposed to all the fury of the fire, the dry old wood of which it was built burning like tinder. Nothing but the walls were left, but still they worked determinedly, unceasingly, to try to save even them.

Presently a blazing rafter fell, then another. A cry of "the roof!" was raised, and every one hurried back a few paces. For a few minutes the excitement was intense; the roof swayed as if struggling in the grip of its destroyer, and then fell with a crash that rent the air like thunder, raising clouds of sparks that filled the air as thickly as the flakes in a storm of snow.

It was all over; the fire had spent its fury, and would now exhaust itself. The worst had come to pass; and Erlesmere, the seat of the Lawrences for centuries past—where kings had feasted, where beauteous dames and gallant knights had held high revel—was now a blackened mass of charred and burning ruin—a thing of the past.

A few days later, Guy, who had been summoned by a telegram from Bertie, stood alone silently regarding the scene of the catastrophe. There was an almost unbearable anguish upon him in this hour, when he looked on the ruins of the inheritance of his fathers—the old house that from generation to generation had been the home of his race—and knew that no time, no pains, no money could ever restore it as it had been. As his eyes dwelt on the utter desolation that lay before him, his face grew white, his heart sickened, and his head sank on his breast in almost uncontrollable grief.

A flood of old memories swept over him. There his gentle mother had lived her peaceful life; there he had seen Kitty Lorton flitting from room to room. Every nook, every cranny in the rambling oak galleries had been replete with associations of a time that was gone forever; there he had spent the light-hearted happy days of childhood, there his love had dawned and strengthened, there he had suffered as he had never thought to suffer again; and he clung with desperate tenacity to all the memories connected with a time which had

been so sweet and yet so bitter. He had been content to hide himself away in foreign lands, to let his life die out from the world where he had once been known, content to give himself up to oblivion, even to the slander and reproach which he knew must attach to his name; but he had always thought regretfully and lovingly of the old home, and now even that was swept from the face of the earth. The last descendant of the Lawrences was now an alien from the land of his fathers, and his birthright a blackened ruin!

He ascended the shattered, crumbling steps of the terrace that had once led up to the old oak door, and there he paused and surveyed the chaos that lay within the walls that were yet standing. Here was a broken piece of a rare old china cup; there the flame-scorched head of a marble statue; at his feet great shapeless masses of corrugated metal that he knew had once been the armor of the old knights and squires of Erlesmere; further on, a portion of delicate Roman mosaic, the remains of a table he had brought to his mother from Italy, which had by some strange chance escaped; and standing alone, weird and gaunt, erect among the costly *débris*, a part of the inner wall, and hanging upon it the charred remains of half a frame and a picture with the face of some old ancestor peering grimly through a mist of darkness. Guy turned away. He could not bear to look upon the utter destruction that had come upon all the old relics, and all the things that his mother had loved and valued, so without one backward look strode hastily from the scene of the disaster. And yet all this while no sign of anger, no word of reproach against Bertie had escaped him.

"Have you no idea how the fire originated?" he had asked him the morning he arrived. "An accident, of course?"

"No one can be more terribly vexed about it than I am," answered Bertie, unwilling to tell a direct lie, yet feeling how impossible it was to speak out and tell Guy all the truth. "I would have given everything I possess rather than it should have happened while the house was in my charge."

"You mustn't take it to heart, Bertie," answered Guy,

kindly, "you couldn't help it. But one is always anxious to trace a disaster of this kind to its cause."

"I can't see that it can do much good now," muttered Bertie.

"You were the first to discover the fire, weren't you? Do you know where it began?"

"In the library, I fancy; but the smoke was too dense to see much," answered Bertie, turning his back to Guy and looking out of the window.

And Guy, fearing that Bertie should think the blame rested on him, asked no more questions; and no suspicion of the truth, no doubt as to the accidental origin of the fire, ever crossed his mind.

There was, of course, much discussion about it among the village folks, as well as among Bertie's friends; but the fact that Bertie had been the first to discover the fire, and that he and Guy—the two whom it most concerned—ascribed it to some accident, one of those which can neither be foreseen nor accounted for afterwards, prevented any approach to the truth—and Bob Smithers escaped detection and remained unsuspected to the last day of his life.

CHAPTER XXXI.



VERY soon after his marriage Guy Lawrence had taken a rambling, low-roofed villa that stood in a sequestered nook a little way out of Naples, and there he and his wife were living in the strictest seclusion.

One brilliant, cloudless day, toward the end of July, in the year following the burning of Erlesmere, Guy was seated by an open window, lying back in his chair, and gazing dreamily at the landscape that was stretched before him, seeing it and yet not seeing it—the quiet grandeur of the scene filling bi-

a dim consciousness of peace and repose, even while his thoughts wandered far away.

To some, sorrow acts as an irritant, goading them into perpetual motion; to others as a sedative—a draught of morphia, lulling them into apathy and dulness of spirit—a ghastly parody on real calm and peace.

So Guy went on the even tenor of his way, living a quiet, aimless life, sufficiently happy to all appearance, and yet so utterly crushed and heart-broken that life had lost all its sweetness for him.

But he was tolerably content that it should be so. It is not given to every man to be happy, and though at times a revolt against the hardness of his fate would come upon him, the fact that that which he had done had proved successful prevented him from regretting it.

Even his last great disaster—the burning of Erlesmere—had not been altogether without its good results. Bertie's regrets and self-reproaches had for the time obliterated all feelings of animosity. The recriminations, the reproaches in which he had—naturally enough—indulged at the time of Guy's marriage had been forgotten. His passion for Celia changed into complete indifference—all the past and its misunderstandings buried between them. They had never been better friends than they were now. Nothing more—no gratitude for his life-long sacrifice did Guy expect. He was perfectly content with the present state of things between himself and his brother. True, he would have been glad to hear more of Bertie's doings during the past year. His letters to Guy—exiled and nearly forgotten in his foreign home—were few and far between; but though they contained little news of himself, the tone of them was affectionate.

In the midst of his reverie Celia entered—Celia the actress, playing the rôle of young English wife, her brilliancy toned down by the extreme simplicity of her white morning dress—and coming towards him, put a letter into his hand.

“A letter for you, Guy, from England,” she said, noting the

eagerness with which he took it, and the disappointment in his face, as he scanned the handwriting on the envelope.

"It is not from Bertie, then?"

"No," he answered, tearing it open, and she, still watching him, saw his face pale suddenly.

It was from Saunders—Bertie's man, and ran thus:

"JERMYN STREET, July 18th.

"HONNERED SIR,—I take the liberty of ritin unbeknone to Mister Bertie, wich is very bad and now lade up and ravin' orful, wich it's no use a beatin about the Bush, Mister Guy is D. T., therefore thort, honnered Sir, as i had better rite and tell you that he had broke down, wich i always thort, askin' your pardon Sir he could never stay the pace he was a goin.

"Your 'umble servant to command,

"THOMAS SAUNDERS.

"P.S.—Sir, i got your adres from Mister Bentham, and if it does not reech you, Honnered Sir, please send for it.

"T. S."

"What is it, sposo mio?" said Celia, tenderly, kneeling by his side. "Something in that letter has troubled you."

Guy started up hurriedly, shaking her off in his impatience.

"Yes, yes, Bertie is ill—very ill, and I must go to England immediately."

"Go to England!" echoed Celia, in dismay. But he hurried from the room without noticing her, and meeting the servant in the doorway, she heard him order the carriage to be sent round and his portmanteau packed, with the greatest haste.

When he returned, she was standing by the window, looking forth as he had looked, but there was an expression on her face, a weary hopelessness that gave him an acute pang of self-reproach, as he felt how far his love for his brother was beyond his love for his wife.

He took her hands and drew her towards him.

"Celia, will you forgive me for leaving you? Bertie may be on his death-bed. If I stayed here, and he were to die, I should feel that I had betrayed a solemn trust. I will come back soon."

She loved him so well still, that a few kind words could drive away the shadow from her face, could even for the moment drive away the bitter thought that in spite of all she was no nearer to gaining his heart.

"How soon, Guy?"

"As soon as I can leave Bertie," he answered, looking anxiously at his watch. "Ah, there is the carriage at last. Good-by, Celia; take good care of yourself till I come back."

And with a hasty kiss he was gone, and she stood gazing after him till tears of disappointment and jealousy hid him from her sight.

There were times when Celia thought her triumph but a poor one. When the warmth of her love, the caresses and demonstrations of affection dear to her southern nature, checked by her husband's coldness—a coldness of which he himself had grown unconscious—seemed to turn back into her own heart, and burn in a fierce and consuming fire.

And Guy went on his way as fast as steam and horses could carry him, and after a weary interval of suspense reached Jermyn Street.

He met Saunders on the top of the stairs.

"How is he now?"

"Awful bad, sir; raving dreadful. He won't eat—"

Guy did not wait to hear more, but entered the room where Bertie lay.

It was too true. There he was, raving in delirium, muttering names incoherently—Celia's, Kitty's, Guy's—in a confused medley—then starting up in his bed, and shrieking that the house was on fire, that the flames were surrounding him, and imploring help in a tone piteous to hear.

Guy soon left the room; the scene was more than he could bear. He sought Saunders, and knowing he was an old and

trustworthy servant, asked him for some explanation of this terrible state of things.

The man knew little beyond what was apparent, but the real facts were as follows :

For some time past Bertie had taken to drinking deeply ; it was his custom to do so when anything had vexed him. Since his acquaintance with Celia his troubles had thickened—her indifference, his heavy debts, and the constant worry of duns had told upon him, and made him hipped and low. “ Nothing like brandy for all such complaints,” he found ; “ it set a fellow up, drove dull care to the wall.” And so the insidious disease had taken root, and ripened, and brought forth all its bitter fruits, destroying health and fortune and peace of mind.

Bertie's down-hill career had been a rapid one. He had grown madly reckless of his future ; in the blindness of his infatuation for Celia, he had never counted the cost of the style in which he was living. He had the best of everything, he knew, but then it was preposterous to suppose that he could do with less. His perfectly appointed three hundred guinea brougham, a masterpiece of Peters', and that pair of chestnuts—that had been coveted by a royal duke, and were only equalled by the well-known bays owned by his Royal Highness's tailor—these were luxuries that cost money, rather more than he could spare from his thousand a year ; but then they were the thing, gave him a tone, and got him talked about.

He knew these actresses well enough—of course he did ; nothing went down with them that was not the fashion. Was he to give up all these advantages because he could not quite afford them ? Absurd !—not to be thought of ; besides, Leoni would set it all right. And Leoni had set it right, so far. He had found the money to meet all this extravagance, with the usual disinterestedness of the Hebrew fraternity ; and “ kites ” had been flown of which the magnitude was appalling, but looking small enough to Bertie at the distant point of view from which he regarded them.

Much of this Guy already knew or suspected ; much of it

Saunders told him. The man's description of Leoni—"A under-bred looking Moses, sir; all nose and watch-chain"—recalled the day when Guy had met him leaving Bertie's rooms. Bertie was heavily involved, no doubt, from what Saunders said of stormy interviews between the pigeon and the hawk—of angry remonstrance on one side, and cool, insolent familiarity on the other. Mr. Leoni had grown threatening at times too; this looked as if the game was nearly played out—as if the birds of prey had struck their quarry, and were about to tear it to pieces.

When Saunders left the room, Guy leant back in his chair, and thought over all that he had heard and seen with something very like despair. A strange fatality seemed to attend all his efforts to serve Bertie.

The momentary triumph he felt when his brother had declared himself completely cured of his hopeless passion for a woman who had deceived and betrayed him, and thankful to be saved by any means from a marriage with her, was destroyed; for it seemed to him that this last state of things was worse than the first. He tried to remind himself that if he had left Bertie to go his own way, and not interposed between him and the woman who had shown him such small mercy, he might by this time have been driven to desperation by the alternate fluctuations of hope and despair. Moreover, Guy felt that it was unjust to attribute his brother's present state to Celia alone.

This fatal habit of drinking had been begun at Oxford. All that he had seen and heard at the time of the steeple-chase convinced him of that. It was true that during the season in London it had greatly increased. The anxiety, the suspense, the uncertainty, the vague hopes, the wild jealousies that had kept him in a constant fever had driven him to seek oblivion and excitement in all manner of excesses; but Guy had questioned Saunders most closely, and all he gained from the man convinced him that *after* his own marriage Bertie had grown better instead of worse.

In September he had been at Erlesmere, living a more healthy out-of-door life, and returning to his old pleasure in field sports, had shown a decided improvement in appearance and spirits; but on his return to London amongst his former companions, his old haunts, the passion for drink had returned in all its force, and he had spent night after night in gambling and debauchery, lying in a feverish slumber half the day, now in the wildest spirits, now in the deepest depression. How Guy's heart ached to think of it all! He thought how the tender mother would have suffered could she have seen her bright, dearly loved boy as he had just seen him, could she have heard his frantic ravings and dreadful cries as he had just heard them—and thanked God that she was not alive.

But every pang that would have wrung her heart found an echo in Guy's. All her anxious solicitude, her womanly tenderness for her younger and best-loved son, she had left as a sorrowful heritage to her elder. He felt that the burden of them was grievous to bear, but the remembrance that it was still in his power to save Bertie from the anxieties that were pressing so heavily on him roused him from the indulgence of his sorrow.

He wrote a note to a celebrated physician, begging him to come to Jermyn Street that afternoon; then consulting a Post Office Directory, and taking another look at Bertie, who was now asleep, he put on his hat and left the room.

He had not far to go; crossing St. James's Square he walked up King Street, and stopped before a large mansion, over the doorway of which was inscribed St. James's Chambers. He entered, and addressing an apoplectic-looking hall porter, inquired for Mr. Leoni. The apoplectic porter scanned him for a moment, and then replied—

“First floor, sir; number six.”

Guy mounted the stairs, and on reaching the first floor saw a small brass plate under a bell-handle, bearing the superscription, “Mr. Leoni.” The door was opened in answer to his summons by an old wizen-faced man, with lank gray hair, a

face with a beard of two or three days' growth, small, restless, ferrety eyes, and a sharp red nose, on the tip of which was a pair of silver-mounted spectacles. He wore a seedy suit of black, with a neck-tie twisted to hide a dirty, much-rumpled shirt—a laudable effort, that was, however, not quite successful. This was Mr. Scrubb, Mr. Isaac Leoni's clerk and familiar. Taking a pen out of his mouth, he asked Guy "who he pleased to want?"

"Is Mr. Leoni at home?"

Mr. Scrubb replied by requesting Guy to walk in. The room they entered was furnished as an office, but contained many things which divested it of its look of business-like propriety. In one corner were two or three driving whips, and the japanned case of a billiard cue, while in a rack fitted to the wall was an array of hunting caps, riding whips, and walking sticks; lying on a sofa were a bridle and bits; hung about the room were several of Fore's hunting scenes, a water-color sketch of Blink Bonny, by Herring, and two French prints of ladies on apparently inaccessible mountains, arrayed in elaborate Parisian toilets, which were skilfully disarranged with the object of exhibiting a liberal amount of boots and stockings. Altogether the room had an unmistakably fast, horsey air, which plainly bespoke the proclivities of the owner.

Guy had taken all this in at a glance, when Mr. Scrubb turned sharply, and asked him what might be his business?

"I wish to see Mr. Leoni."

"Mr. Leoni's rather busy, you know; got a client with him now; wouldn't I do as well?"

"No, my business is of a private nature."

"Oh, ah, yes, of course. Is it money?"

"If you mean, do I want to borrow money—no," replied Guy, in a tone that implied that he wished no more questions asked.

"Oh, very well, sir," said Mr. Scrubb, eying him furtively as he shuffled towards the door, "I'll go and tell Mr. Leoni." Then stopping suddenly, "What name shall I say?"

"Mr. Lawrence."

"Oh, ah, yes. Mr. Lawrence of Erlesmere?" asked Scrubb, quickly.

"Yes."

"I'll go at once, sir."

After a short absence Mr. Scrubb returned, saying that Mr. Leoni would be with Mr. Lawrence directly.

In a few minutes the door was flung open, and Mr. Leoni swaggered in. A coarse, low-bred style of man, looking much the same as when Guy met him at Jermyn Street, but now he was dressed in a short lounging-coat, made of blue serge, and elaborately trimmed with yellow cord.

"How do, shir—how do?" said he. "Sit down, shir—shan't charge anything for that."

And Mr. Leoni having laughed at his small joke, threw himself into an easy-chair.

"I came to see you on a confidential matter," began Guy.

"Yes, shir; all my matters is confidential—point of honor, you know, shir. Oh, you meansh Scrubb," following Guy's glance. "You needn't mind him: Scrubb's confidential too; forgetsh all he hears directly it's shaid. Eh, Scrubb?"

Guy went to the point at once.

"My brother, Mr. Deverell; has had dealings with you; may I ask what bills of his you hold?"

Mr. Leoni's little eyes sparkled. He knew Guy's resources better than Guy did himself; it was his business to know every rent-roll in England. Bertie Deverell's brother could only be there with one object—to pay Bertie Deverell's debts.

"Well, you know, ash I wash shaying, these little matters are confidential; but it's all in the family, so I don't mind telling you. Scrubb, give me my memorandum-book."

A small brass-locked book was handed to him, and after turning over a few leaves he stopped, and began to scan it.

"Ah, here it is: Bertie Deverell, Esq. Let me see—five and four's nine, and five's fourteen—blesh my heart, how small thinksh amounsh up. Fourteen and sheven's twenty-one, and

two's twenty-three—your brother's been very bad, shir, lifts his finger; ah, bad thing lifting your finger—twenty-three, twenty-eight, thirty-four—dear me, dear me, who'd a thought it. Mr. Deverell knowsh how to live, shir; ah, that he doesh, and no mistake—forty-four, fifty-four, eighty-four. He's very hard on me, shir; ain't he, Scrubb?—drives hard bargains—but I like him, Mr. Lawrensh, I like him, and so I puts up with it: eighty-four, ninety-four, a hundred and fourteen. Lor' blesh your soul, shir, he knowsh he can get what he liksh out of me, and that's how it is he's drained me so—a hundred and fourteen, a hundred and thirty-four, a hundred and shixty-four. There. There it is, shir: shixteen thousand four hundred and fifty poundsh, to a shixpensh."

Guy gave a slight start, and bit his lips with annoyance. Controlling himself, he said calmly,

"You knew my brother's means, no doubt. May I ask how you expected him to pay so large a sum?"

"There, there, shir! there you go, like all the rest of the world, talking as if we're a shet of hard-hearted, blood-sucking harpies, without any conshideration for anybody. Of course, I didn't expect him to pay, shir. I only wanted the interest; pay me off the prinshipal when he can. I don't care when. I'm in no hurry. When he marrish a gal with money, or shomething or other turnsh up."

Guy stifled the feeling of disgust this speech created.

"You will pardon me, I know you better." He spoke in a quiet but stern tone. "You allowed my brother to contract these debts because you believed that I should pay them. When you found your victim—stay, no bluster, if you please—I say, when you found your victim dangerously ill, and you were in fear of losing all this spoil, you went to him, stricken as he was, almost to death, and tried to bully him into paying—you thought then that he would come to me. You were right: probably he would; as it is, he is unaware that I have come to you. I intend to redeem these bills without consulting him."

The scowl that had settled on Mr. Leoni's face gave way to an obsequious grin.

"Ah, Mr. Lawrensh," he said, in a tone of reproachful remonstrance, "you're too hard on a feller, 'pon my shoul you are. I only went to ask him to let me have a trifle if convenient to him, if quite convenient, mindsh you; and then I found him a leetle poorly. Now do you think I'd be so unfeeling as to bother a shentleman—such a nishe young shentleman as Mr. Deverell too—when he's poorly, if I'd known it? No, now, 'pon my shoul I wouldn't—I wouldn't, 'pon my honor."

"What did you say the amount is?"

"Shixteen thoushand four hundred and fifty pounds."

Guy put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a cheque-book.

"That represents how much, may I ask, in actual money lent?"

"Nearly all of it; nearly all of it. We must live, you know, and consider the risk, shir. Suppose anything had happened to him. I should have been a ruined man, shir; clean ruined. I never did it so cheap to any one before, I take my solemn oath—but then I always liked Mr. Deverell."

While he was speaking Guy had written a cheque, which he tore from his cheque-book.

"You know how much of what you say is true—I can guess. Here is a cheque for ten thousand pounds. Allow me to speak, please."

Mr. Leoni threw himself back in his chair with a contemptuous laugh. Guy continued,

"This, no doubt, is more than my brother ever received from you, with a very liberal interest besides. Give me all the bills you hold of his and I'll hand you this cheque."

"Do you think I'm a baby in swaddling clothes? Watsch yer talking about? Give up six thoushand quid for nothing! What next, I wonder?"

"Do you refuse?"

"Of course I refuse; and if that's all you've got to say, shir, I'll wish you good-day."

"It's *not* all I've got to say; there's something more."

"Very well, Mr. Lawrensh; only if it's asking me to give up six thousand pounds or six thousand pence, it's clean waste of time, that's all."

"We shall see."

Guy looked at him fixedly for a few moments, then in a distinct tone continued—

"Four years ago I was a steward at Northampton races."

Mr. Leoni turned his head quickly, and cast a piercing look at Guy.

"You will recollect the incident I am going to speak of, for you were there: I saw you in the ring. A certain horse called Fleetwing was first favorite for the cup—I see this interests you—you remember the particulars, no doubt. This horse was looked upon as sure to win, and so it would, but it was pulled on the post and lost by a neck—my memory has not failed me, has it, Mr. Leoni?"

Mr. Leoni had turned a greenish yellow, and he fidgeted uneasily in his chair.

"I shan't want you any more, Scrubb: you can be off."

When that worthy had left the room, Mr. Leoni replied to Guy.

"I think I remember something about it," he said with attempted carelessness—"that sort of thing's so common nowadays—one almost forgets. But all the same I can't see what you're driving at."

"You do remember it?"

"Well, I saw the race, but I don't believe the horse was pulled at all, although there was a fuss about it in the papers."

"Yes there was: the papers stated that the case had been investigated, and Blackett, the jockey, punished—that the *author* of this piece of villany got clear off, for no threats could wring his name from his accomplice; the owner was above

suspicion, and even now would give a thousand pounds to stand face to face with the scoundrel that planned it all. The papers said all this, and plenty more—amongst other things that Leoni, the well-known turfite, had won five thousand pounds upon the race. Was this a fact? ”

Mr. Leoni was getting more and more ill at ease, and the perspiration was standing in beads on his forehead, as he blurted out—

“ I can’t see what the deuce it’s got to do with you ; and listen here, Mr. Lawrensh : you came here on business, and we couldn’t come to terms. All right. I can’t see what all that’s got to do with Fleetwing at Northampton ; so if you’ve nothing else to talk about, we needn’t waste no more time.”

“ I won’t detain you much longer, Mr. Leoni, you’ll see the application presently. Now for the sequel, which was *not* in the papers. Some time ago, shortly after my return to England, I was sent for to Newmarket. A man was dying, mortally injured by the kick of a horse, and had something important to communicate to me. I hurried down ; the poor fellow was a helper in some training stables. They took me to his bedside, and in the dying man I recognized Blackett, the rider of Fleetwing, at Northampton. You begin to see the application? The poor fellow on his death-bed wrote a confession that he had been bribed to make Fleetwing lose, and that his employer in the transaction was one Leoni, betting-man and money-lender. That confession is now in my pocket.”

There was a short pause, during which Mr. Leoni, livid with rage and terror, cast furtive glances at Guy ; at last he broke the silence—

“ What’s the terms? ”

“ A cheque for ten thousand pounds, and my word of honor not to use this confession so long as you never attempt that sort of game again, in exchange for the bills you hold of Mr. Deverell’s.”

“ And suppose I don’t agree? ”

“ Then I resist your claim at law, for I am practically your

debtor, and," taking a paper out of his pocket, "I post this interesting document in the rooms at Newmarket."

Leoni saw that he was checkmated.

"Look here, now," he said, after considering a moment; "sell me that bit 'o rag outright; it's no good to you, don't yer know, and I'll give you a monkey for it."

Guy folded up the paper and returned it to his pocket.

"No, thank you. I feel rather guilty as it is, in compounding such a swindle; the least I owe to society is to look after you for the future."

"You won't do it, then?"

"Certainly not."

Mr. Leoni went to an *escritoire*, and took from it a bundle of papers, then advancing to Guy, "You're smart, Mr. Lawrensh, dev'lish smart, 'pon my shoul you are. I don't want to flatter yer too much, but you've missed yer tip, shir; if you'd been in our profession, you'd have *done*. You've cleaned me me out of six thousand quid, and somebody else must suffer for it. I can't afford it, and if that ain't fair, I don't know what is. There's Mr. Deverell's stiff, shir, every penn'orth of it."

"And there's the cheque."

Mr. Leoni gave a sort of a groan as he cast his eyes upon it.

"Ten thousand! dear, dear. But I say, about that other little affair?—honor, you know, Mr. Lawrensh."

"That's a security that you have little faith in, I should think."

"Well, what can I do?" cried Mr. Leoni, in a tone of remonstrance.

"Make a virtue of necessity, and put up with it this time. Good-morning."

When Guy returned he found Bertie awake, much refreshed by his sleep, but terribly exhausted by the violent paroxysm that had seized him in his delirium. He smiled feebly, but with a pleased look as Guy approached.

"Ah, Guy, is that you?" he said, as he tried to press his

brother's hand. "It's awfully good of you to come. How did you know I was seedy?"

"Some one sent me word," answered Guy, seating himself by the bedside. "But never mind all that: do you feel any better?"

"Yes, much better; my brain doesn't burn so. I shall be all right again in a day or two."

There was a slight pause, then Bertie continued: "I won't attempt to deceive you, Guy; it's drink that has done this. God knows the shame I feel in confessing it to you, but you've always been such a brick, I can't tell you a lie. What a wretched—"

"Hush, Bertie, don't excite yourself, there's a dear old fellow; that's all past and forgotten. We want to bring you round now. Your head's too low; let me raise it."

And so silencing him with kindly words, Guy rearranged the pillows with the tenderness of a woman.

Late one night, a few days after, as Guy was leaving Bertie's rooms to go to his hotel, a woman, jumping out of a cab, ran up to him.

"Sir, is Mr. Deverell at home?"

"Yes, but he's very ill—confined to his bed."

"Too ill to go out, sir? Oh, Mr. Lawrence, ask him to come. Don't you know me, sir?"

"Who are you?" asked Guy, looking at her in the uncertain light. "I don't remember you."

"I am Rosie Smithers, sir. You remember father, down at Erlesmere? perhaps you never noticed me, though I've seen you many a time; and father's dying." And she began to cry.

"Dying? My poor girl, is there anything I can do for you?"

"Father sent me for Mr. Bertie—he says he must see him. He's got something on his mind, and he can't rest. I daren't tell you; but, oh, sir, say you'll forgive him, and it was all through me, and he's dying now. Oh, you will forgive him," and sobbing, she caught Guy's hand in hers.

"Forgive him? yes, Rosie, if I've anything to forgive," answered Guy, who thought it very probable divers pheasants and hares might be weighing on Smithers' conscience. "I will come with you, if you like, to see him."

The girl hesitated.

"Sir, I don't know as he won't be angry with me for bringing you. Are you *sure* Mr. Bertie can't come?"

"Quite sure."

"Then, will you come—and, oh, Mr. Lawrence, if you would promise not to be angry with him? He's past all punishment now, sir."

"I promise you, Rosie, to forgive him whatever wrong he has done me. Will that do? Come, jump in—where to?"

The girl gave the direction—Chapel Row, St. Giles.

"It's a terrible place, sir," she said, looking at him in a piteous, frightened way; "we've come very low."

"How was it your father left Erlesmere?"

"We've been away ever so long—since—since—oh, sir, I dursn't tell you." And she burst out sobbing again.

"Come, don't cry, Rosie," said Guy, kindly. "We must try and do something for you."

And then he set himself to think what he could do—vexed, as a man always is, to see a woman, and a pretty woman, too, crying.

It *was* a terrible place, this last resort of Bob Smithers, the poacher. Among sickening sights and smells Guy followed Rosie up the dirty street—too narrow for the cab to enter—up the broken, crooked stairs, until she paused before a door.

"You will remember your promise, sir," she said, turning round to him with great, pitiful eyes.

A garret, where the low, sloping rafters met the floor; a heap of rags, and a man stretched upon them, fighting with death, each struggling, gasping breath he drew coming with a rumbling, hollow noise through his emaciated chest. Bare arms, flung down by his side, all muscle and bone—no flesh;

eyes staring from sunken cheeks; livid, foam-flecked mouth--a horrible and ghastly sight.

"Father dear, I've brought Mr. Lawrence. Mr. Deverell is ill, and couldn't come to you," said Rosie, going gently to the dying man's side.

"How are you, my poor fellow?" said Guy, coming forward.

The man stared at him, and then laughed—a horrible laugh, which ended in a choking fit of coughing.

"It ain't no good—yer too late. Have yer brought the peelers with yer? Tell 'em I've cheated 'em—they can't lag me now. Look 'ere." And he held up a skeleton arm—"What have yer come for?"

"Rosie said you wanted to see my brother. I have come in his stead."

"Ah, yes; I'm a bit dazed like. But it weren't you—it was t'other one—the young 'un, as I wanted to see. He knew all about it. Look 'ere—that fine house was yourn, weren't it?"

"What house?"

"The big 'un, up at Erlesmere. Did yer ever find the chap as burnt it down? I dare say you'd a'most killed him if you had?"

"It was an accident," said Guy, thinking he raved.

"Mr. Dev'rell told you that, did he?" raising his head with a terrible effort. "He knew better. It warn't no accident; I did it."

"You? good God!" cried Guy, shrinking from him, his face suddenly transfigured with horror. "What possible motive—?"

"Ask *him* that. Ask Mr. Dev'rell what motive I had, and p'raps he'll tell you. It ain't no more my fault than his, come to that. If it hadn't bin for him I shouldn't a' done it."

"My brother? What had he done?"

"Done? Ain't it nothing to try and take a man's daughter from him—ain't it—?"

But again the labored breath failed, and broke into a paroxysm of coughing.

"Father, don't try to talk—don't excite yourself, dear father; let me tell him. Oh, sir, for pity's sake, don't be hard on us!"

"I am utterly bewildered. What does all this mean?"

"It was my fault, sir—all my fault; lay the blame on me. I was nothing but a foolish girl, and Mr. Bertie—he used to meet me, and talk to me, and my head was turned, sir; and I thought it would be a fine thing to be a lady. And it came to father's ears how I'd been seen with one of the gentlemen, and he was very angry with me; and then I told Mr. Bertie I mustn't see him any more, and—"

"Well?" said Guy, very sternly.

"Oh, Mr. Lawrence, I was only a silly girl. He said I should go with him, and he'd make me a lady, and no one should be cross to me any more. I knew it was wrong, sir; but while he was persuading me, and speaking to me so kind, I didn't feel how wicked it was. But one day it came over me, like, what a bad girl I was, and how all them fine speeches was tempting me to evil. I wanted to get away, sir, for I knew as long as I was there I couldn't help listening to him, and believing him, when he said he loved me, and only meant me well. And then one day, sir, when father had been dreadful angry, and had said he would kill me if he ever found me talking to Mr. Bertie again, and I was all alone, and very miserable, not knowing what to do, there came a letter from my aunt, up in London, saying as she was feeling very lonesome, and would I come and stop a day or two; so I just packed up my things—father was often away for days and nights together; I couldn't wait to ask his leave—and left the key of the house with a neighbor, but I wouldn't tell her where I was going. I thought as Mr. Bertie would be inquiring, perhaps, and I wanted to do right, sir, and go away from him. I meant to write to father, but when I got to the station it came across me as he might return that night and wonder where I was; so

I went down to Bill Simmons, you know, sir, the farrier, and I asked him to tell father I'd gone to aunt's; and he said he would see him that night—they was to meet at the Golden Lion, and he'd be sure and give my message. And he never did, sir."

Rosie burst out crying afresh, but Guy spoke not a word.

"And when I got to aunt's, she said as she'd take me back herself to Erlesmere in a day or two, and there was no call to write. But she put it off, and when we got there, sir, it was too late. Father had heard that Mr. Bertie was away, and he wouldn't believe but what I was with him. He was mad with rage; he wouldn't 'a done it else. Oh, sir, indeed he wouldn't! And when at last I found him and told him how it was, he was terribly sorry to think of what he'd done. He's never been the same since—he hasn't indeed, sir. Oh, for pity's sake forgive him—him and me. It was all my doing."

The girl ceased speaking, and there was a silence, only broken by her sobs and by the sound of the man's heavy breathing.

Guy could not speak. His heart was hot within him at the thought of the wrong which had been done him. He was not a man to bear such an injury tamely. A fierce desire for vengeance seized him.

Vengeance! His eyes fell on the distorted features, the emaciated limbs before him. That was God's, not his.

"Oh, don't be hard on him, sir. Say you'll forgive him, and he'll die easier," sobbed Rosie. "It was all through love of me."

"Don't you go beggin' no favors of him. After all, it warn't me as done it. I was druv to it. I don't want his pardon if he don't like to give it."

Driven to it—yes—and by whom? Was the man so much to blame? Were not his feelings, his desire for revenge under his fancied wrongs, almost excusable in so rough and untutored a nature?

Struggling with himself, Guy came nearer to him.

"I will try—I do forgive you," he said suddenly. "My

poor fellow, you are very bad—after all, it's not *my* pardon that you need."

He felt how near this man was to death—to eternity; and yet he could scarcely bring himself to break through his reserve, and speak to him of religion.

"Oh, I ain't goin' down on my marrer-bones, prayin' and cantin'—what's the good, when I knows if I was to get better I'd be just the same again? I ain't done much 'arm. Some people's born respectable and others isn't—the Almighty won't be as 'ard on us as other folks is—He knows we's druv to things."

Hopeless in such a case as this, Guy stood by the dying man's side, silent.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he said at length. "Have you had a doctor? I will go for one."

"The doctor's been, sir. He says it's no good his coming any more," whispered Rosie.

"I will go for another, at all events. I will come again in the morning."

"It ain't no good, I shall be a dead 'un afore mornin': I thought as I'd be a bit easier if I told one of you. I was sorry-like when I found I'd made a mistake—but I was druv to it, I was," said the man incoherently. "It's a 'ard world. I ain't sorry to go off the 'ooks. If it warn't for the child—little Rosie: there ain't no one as'll see after her. I've always been a rough kind of chap: but I ain't been bad to her."

"I'll see that Rosie is taken care of," said Guy quietly.

"Will yer though—do you mean it?" a sudden light coming into the fading eyes. "And yer won't let t'other one—the young 'un, come nigh her? Do yer mind givin' us your 'and upon it?"

Guy put his hand into the rough skeleton one.

"Good-by, my poor fellow," he said kindly, and then he paused and hesitated. "One question before I go. You said Mr. Deverell knew of this. Are you sure of that? How and when did he discover—that the fire was no accident?"

"I saw him—same night—and told un," gasped the man—his voice failing him.

Without another word Guy turned and left the room, beckoning Rosie to follow him. "Get him what he needs," he said, putting some money into her hand. "I will go for a doctor, and send a woman to stay the night with you. You will see me to-morrow."

Rosie burst into a torrent of mingled tears and blessings, but Guy broke from her and went down the rickety stairs.

Having performed his promise and procured assistance for Rosie and her father, Guy wended his way back to his hotel.

Far into the night he paced restlessly up and down his room, unable to sleep, distracted by conflicting thoughts. But uppermost of all, was the remembrance of Bertie's deceit.

Bertie had deceived him deliberately; had led him to believe that the fire was the result of an accident, when he had known it to be the offspring of his own folly. Ay—folly was a light word for it, for according to the girl's innocent story, it was not his fault that folly had not turned to crime. Pained, angry, sore at heart, Guy struggled with himself for a long while, feeling how hard it was to forgive the wrong that had been done him. Visions of the old, beautiful home rose before him, and filled him with regret for all he had lost—and lost through Bertie.

That was the pain of it; wilful and passionate, unscrupulously extravagant he had known Bertie to be, but he had hoped that the anxiety his embarrassments had caused him, and the humiliation and repentance he would probably feel when he found that Guy had rescued him, might have the effect of keeping him within bounds for the future. But now all those hopes were dashed to the ground. Now Guy knew that Bertie had been guilty of far worse things than these, which he had hoped time and experience would cure, and the indignation he felt, in its intensity, well nigh swept away all other feelings.

And then came other thoughts, thoughts of Bertie in his

weakness, raving, suffering, stricken almost unto death; thoughts of the time when the bright, handsome boy his mother had loved so well, had been confided to his care—whom he had sworn to protect; and his anger melted, his heart softened, and he resolved to speak no word of all he had learnt until he had schooled himself to do so without anger, until Bertie had so far recovered as to bear the excitement of such an interview without danger.

About a fortnight later, Guy was at Jermyn Street, seated in an arm-chair by a sofa on which Bertie was lying.

"I think you are all right again now, young one," he said, "you won't want me any longer."

Bertie turned his eyes to Guy with a grateful look.

"Yes, Guy, I've pulled through, thanks to you. And you are going away to-morrow?"

"Yes, I must go to-morrow."

There was a short pause, then Guy broke the silence.

"Bertie, I've something to speak to you about before I go. When you were very ill you were sent for to see Bob Smithers—you remember him?"

An unnecessary question—for Bertie's face gave the answer.

"Smithers! what could he—?"

"He was dying. He wanted to see you. I went in your stead. He had something he wished to say before he died. Can you guess what it was?"

"Guy, listen"—began Bertie, pale and agitated.

"I'd rather not, Bertie. I know all about it, so do you, that's what I can't understand; why you should have deceived me about it."

"It was all a mistake," cried Bertie, starting up. "I knew nothing of the girl, or where she was, at the time of the fire, I give you my word, Guy."

"I know that; yet, considering all you had done to get the girl talked about, it was scarcely wonderful that the father in his passion should believe she was with you."

"It was horribly unfortunate that she should go away at the same time."

"A misfortune caused by you, for you drove her away," answered Guy, speaking shortly, as if the subject was disagreeable to him. "Please don't make excuses, Bertie. I feel too strongly about it. I little thought that I owed the ruin of Erlesmere to you."

It was the only reproach that escaped him, and the moment it had passed his lips he regretted it.

There was silence for a few moments.

"I can't ask you to forgive me," stammered Bertie at last.

"No, Bertie, don't ask me," interrupted Guy, placing one hand on Bertie's shoulder, "I forgive you without. But I've something else to talk to you about—money."

"Seldom a pleasant theme to those who want it, and that has been my chronic condition since I went 'tick' at the tuck shop when I was a youngster at school," answered Bertie with a forced laugh.

"You've been getting into debt for some time, of course—I know that, Bertie; but I hoped you would have come to me to help you out of your embarrassments; you wouldn't have found me more difficult to deal with than Mr. Leoni. Oh, yes, I know he's the disinterested friend in need. I met him leaving your room one day—terrible scoundrel that Mr. Leoni: don't have anything to do with him, young one."

Bertie looked very crestfallen.

"Well, Guy, I confess I have had dealings with him, and—large dealings too; I lost hatfuls of tin on the turf, one way or another. I didn't like to ask you, you know, and what the deuce was I to do?"

"Didn't like to ask me? I suppose it would come to that in the end. Don't bet on horse-racing, Bertie—no gentleman can hold his own with the blacklegs who infest a betting-ring. I suppose your allowance is not enough for you; we must talk that over another time, but here is something to relieve you for the present," and Guy handed him a small packet of papers.

Bertie took it and opened it. It contained his bills for over sixteen thousand pounds, the money he owed to Leoni.

"Oh, Guy—"

"There, never mind that, Bertie; we've no time to waste in thanks. Say good-by instead, for I must go."

Bertie seized his hand, and a big lump rose in his throat, but with a struggle he mastered it, and gulped out "good-by."

"Take care of yourself, Bertie; don't get into a fix again if you can help it, but if you do, come to me, and see if I can't pull you through it."

And taking up his hat Guy hurried away, eager to escape from his brother's gratitude, and in mortal terror of anything approaching a scene.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN a small salon—all glitter and gilt, mirrors and ruby velvet—in one of the most fashionable hotels in Paris, three women were together. A year and a-half does not make much perceptible difference in the appearance of young people, yet it had changed two or three then present from girls into women, and in the third—Mrs. Hoare, the wife of the banker, whose riches had so greatly increased that they had become a thing to marvel at, a subject of speculation and curiosity—it had made a change that was not an improvement.

She had somehow lost her individuality, she had become an automatic mirror of fashion; a walking advertisement of the latest modes. Women studied the folds and trimmings of her dress, the shape of her chignon, the size of her bonnet, as they studied their Bibles—rather more, perhaps, some of them. So perfect was she in every grotesque device, every newest whim of that most ravenous goddess, Fashion, who swallows up beauty and youth, freshness and purity, all in her fell clutches—that

to follow her at the humblest distance, to imitate her however faintly, was to attain to the height of their glorious ambition, was to reach that blessed ultimatum of feminine hopes, and be "in the fashion." What time, what labor, what health and strength and money were wasted to make this one woman perfect, according to the laws of fashion in the nineteenth century—a *chef-d'œuvre* of art, with all natural perfections hidden or obliterated!

Dress had always been a mania with Mrs. Hoare; it had been growing upon her, and with the increase of wealth, when no bounds were set to her extravagant expenditure, it had become so great that, little by little, it was swallowing up all the lovable qualities natural to her. No woman can dress perfectly (according to fashionable ideas of perfection), even with the help of milliners and maids, without bestowing much time and thought on the subject; and a woman who becomes an abject votary of fashion, a woman who, like Mrs. Hoare, tries to out-Paris Paris, must necessarily divide her time into two portions—one to the attainment of perfection, the other to the exhibition of it. For where is the good of being perfectly dressed, if there is no one to see it? So, between fashion and society, Mrs. Hoare came to have less and less time to devote to pleasing others—making them happy, and fondling her children as she used to do; and though she could never be anything but good-natured and pleasing, yet she was a trifle less charming and lovable than she had been; and it seemed as if gradually, almost imperceptibly, the fine-lady part of her threatened to predominate over the homely and womanly. It seemed as if art was doing its best to swallow up the beauty of mind and heart, as well as of face and figure.

See her as she lies back in her gilded chair and gazes wearily at the florid decorations of this Parisian hotel! The stiff and voluminous folds of the most intensely Parisian of dresses deprive her attitude of all ease and grace; the huge bows and buckles and stilted heels of her shoes disguise her small feet, the long, massive, yellow chignon disfigures her pretty head;

and on her face is a weary, slightly dissatisfied look, that shows increase of wealth has not brought increase of happiness.

One of the other women in the room formed a most striking contrast to this pretty Dresden china shepherdess. She wore a gray dress made of some soft, clinging material that fitted lightly to her well-moulded figure, and swept on to the ground, and lay there in a mass of shadowy artistic folds. Bands of black velvet at her neck and wrists and waist showed the fairness of her skin, and the delicate rounded proportions of her slight figure. Her hair, which was simply bound round her head, came low on her forehead, and the face bent over her work was a very striking one.

And yet it was a face which no one would think of calling pretty. It had lost the bloom and roundness of extreme youth; it had lost freshness, though it had gained that which is a compensation for all the charms of youthful "prettiness." Artists and physiognomists—acute observers—might have called it beautiful, but not pretty; it never could be pretty any more, and to ordinary eyes it was only very sweet, and very, very placid.

It was the face of a woman who had suffered. It had a repose about it, a settled calm, like one of those ideal pictures of a *sœur de charité*, of a young woman who has set herself apart from the world, and has done with the life she has scarcely begun—has done with all the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows, and in resignation has gained peace and rest.

This was the peculiarity of her appearance, that though she was evidently very young, she had a look of being prematurely aged—of having, through some illness or suffering, come to look much older than she was. "Sadly changed," as Mrs. Hoare would say when people remarked the little governess. "She used to be quite nice-looking—such a pretty color—and now she always looks so pale and worn."

But no one knew any cause for the change, or attached any little romantic history to the alteration in Kitty Lorton. About a year and a half ago she had not been well—never

very seriously ill, only rather ill, and visibly drooping; but she had lived her life much as usual, and the illness had been quietly got over and forgotten. But somehow, very gradually and unconsciously, people began to treat her and look upon her differently.

When she first came to Mrs. Hoare she was regarded more as a companion and playfellow of the children; now she was trusted with the charge of them, and considered quite old enough, and competent to be their governess. True, they had masters and mistresses for every possible or impossible accomplishment under the sun, and she had little to do with their instruction, but, with the care of them, everything. The little pale, quiet governess sometimes smiled sadly to herself, to think how people seemed to treat her as if she had suddenly grown so much older; but she never wondered, for she felt the difference in herself.

In those few years that had elapsed since the summer of Lady Caroline's death, she felt as if she had almost lost her identity; that the Kitty Lorton of those days could not be the Kitty Lorton of these. She looked back on the bright, happy girl, who used to be so gay and coquettish and thoughtless, with a sort of incredulity as if it could not have been herself. She felt as if it were so much more natural that she should be as she was now, grave and quiet, and saddened—a woman who, before she had reached three-and-twenty, had lost all trace of girlishness. From that summer, three and a-half years ago, she dated everything; for since then she had lived her life and done with it—done with the hopes of girlhood, and settled down with resignation and peacefulness at three-and-twenty to the certainty of the fate she had so much dreaded then. People would have laughed at her if she had told them all she thought and felt, but she knew her own heart, knew that it was no mere girlish disappointment that made her feel so far apart from the hopes and anticipations that brighten women's lives—knew that she had no desire now, no hope, except that

nothing might happen to destroy the calm which had come to her through much suffering.

She tried very hard, too, not to let the great sorrow of her own life sour her, and make her envious of the happiness of others. Every now and then she looked up from the elaborate lace-work which she was trying to extricate from the tangle into which it had grown beneath Mrs. Hoare's careless fingers, with great interest at Lily Ransford, who was standing in the window, gazing more from idleness than curiosity up and down the gay street.

She was changed too, since the day when she had declaimed against her sister's indiscriminate abuse of actresses. She had developed into a woman, a very pretty woman—and though she retained much of her old mocking, careless manner, there was a shadow of newly gained seriousness on her fair face that was infinitely becoming to it. She was dressed fashionably, though she seemed somehow to have adopted the picturesqueness without the absurdity of her sister's dress, and she incessantly twirled a massive diamond ring, that shone conspicuously on the third finger of her left hand.

"Like the red star on the pictures at the Royal Academy, to show that I am disposed of," she used to say, laughingly.

And Kitty used to look at her wonderingly and lovingly, and think that it was her coming marriage that had made her just a little graver than usual—think how glad she was that no disappointment was likely to come near her and change her merry, sunshiny nature—no cankerous worm to eat away the rose-leaves scattered in the pathway of her life.

"Who do you think is here, Clara?" asked Lily, suddenly.

"It would be easier to tell you who is not. All the world and his wife."

"All the world, but not his wife; a wise man leaves her behind when he comes to Paris. I wonder why Charlie was so deluded as to bring us here."

"I am happy to say Charlie knows his duty to his wife

better than you can teach him, Lily. He would bring the children—that was not my doing.”

“No; they would have been happier and better running about in the country, poor mites, than learning prematurely the follies and absurdities of Parisian life,” said Lily, seriously. “But to return to our mutton. Can you guess who I met on the stairs to-day?”

“Why do you trouble me to guess? Who was it?”

“Bertie Deverell; but so changed, so terribly changed, that I almost passed him before I knew him. He looks so worn and haggard; so old, comparatively speaking, as if he had been very, very ill. I was so sorry for him—but he was with a number of other fellows; I could only just speak to him.”

“Dear, dear! what can be the matter with him? I’m rather sorry that he’s here, though. I heard Charlie say that he was in a very fast set, and it was just as well not to know too much of him.”

“Clara! poor Bertie, our cousin!”

“Who was with him? Did you know any of the other men?”

“No one, except that little weak-eyed Lord Leath, who used to be at some of your parties. I always hated that little fellow—looks as if he had been fed on milk-and-water all his life; but poor Bertie was quite different: he used to be such a good-natured bright boy; he can’t be much more than a boy now—about three-and-twenty, I suppose.”

“Oh, more than that, surely,” said Mrs. Hoare, with a yawn. “When is Charlie coming back?”

“He is not quite three-and-twenty,” said a quiet little voice from the corner. “He is a little younger than I am.”

Mrs. Hoare started in astonishment.

“You, Miss Lorton? Oh, I forgot; you knew him in Aunt Caroline’s lifetime.”

Kitty smiled to herself to think how well she had known him, but she said nothing—only regretted that she had spoken at all.

"You don't seem to take much interest in poor Bertie, Clara," said Lily, reproachfully; "you never cared a rap for him, poor boy—only for Guy; but I always had the bad taste to like Bertie best—he's more my style; just a little *méchant*. But Guy—well, I never could help thinking him a-wee bit priggish—perhaps because you always set him up for such a hero. Poor Guy! I wonder what's become of him."

That this subject had more interest for Mrs. Hoare was evident in the renewed animation of her listless face; and it was pitiful to see the sudden breaking up of the calm, the mute, eager questioning, in the sweet, pale face of the governess.

"Guy is at Naples," responded Mrs. Hoare, curtly. "That you couldn't appreciate him only shows that he wasn't quite fast enough to reach the high standard you set up as your style."

"Don't be so savage, Clara. I'm quite willing to confess that it's a sort of natural dislike to own other people's superiority that prevents me from caring very much for those goody sort of people. And why do you always speak of him in the past tense as if he were dead?"

"He is dead to us. We can't associate with that woman, so we're not likely to see him any more; he knows it, and that's why he has hidden himself abroad since his marriage. But I think he'd be rather surprised to hear himself called 'goody;' I thought that was the cant term of you fast young ladies for any one demonstratively religious—always preaching and distributing tracts, and that sort of thing."

"Well, it was your fault for always setting him up as a model. I don't suppose he himself had any idea of going in for being a hero of the 'goody' type—poor Guy!"

"If it's setting him up for a model to say that he was more gentlemanly, courteous, and honorable than most of the men of the present day, then I do set him up as a model; but it's simply absurd to call him 'goody.' I never heard him speak of religion or make the smallest pretence to it in my life,

though I have heard Aunt Caroline say he *was* religious in a quiet sort of way."

"If he *is* so gentlemanly—so very honorable—then the world maligns him cruelly," said Lily, gravely.

"Lily! what do you mean? Is it possible you can repeat those infamous slanders?"

"I hope they are slanders—I believe they are, for I cannot think so badly of Guy as to think them true. But it's a pity, a very great pity, that he should have put himself in such a position, that people can even say such things of him. Why, even Teddy believes them, and says it is a well-known fact that Bertie was in love with Guy's wife, and that Guy first of all did all he knew to set his brother against her, and then married her himself. He says that there are several fellows in that set—Bertie's set—who knew all about it at the time who wouldn't speak to Guy if they met him, and that it is probably because he dreads meeting people, knowing what they must think of him, that he remains abroad."

"Hush, Lily: I won't hear another word! If Colonel Temple has the bad taste to entertain his future wife with slanderous reports of her cousin, you at least should know better than to repeat them."

"You are so impatient, Clara. Didn't I tell you I didn't believe all this about Guy? I only think it's a pity he should have given an appearance of truth to these slanders, by remaining abroad—by being married so secretly, and by giving up all correspondence or intercourse with us or any of his former friends—only that makes me fear that there must be some small foundation of truth to all this falsehood, that he may have done something he has repented of, and is ashamed of."

"He may be ashamed of his wife, but he's not the man to do a thing he'd be ashamed to own. He'd be much more likely to have sacrificed himself to some foolish Quixotic notion of generosity—because this horrible woman threw herself on his pity, or something. Whatever motive he may have had for marrying her, you may be sure it was not a selfish one. If the truth

ever comes out—I don't suppose it ever will—you'll find I'm right. Now pray don't talk any more about it—I hate discussing these sort of things."

And with an air of intense fatigue Mrs. Hoare relapsed into her former state of languid repose, smoothed her ruffled feathers, half-closed her eyes, and resumed her inspection of the opposite wall.

"I didn't know you had so much energy left," said Lily, with a light laugh. "I haven't seen you show so much about anything, except the Paris fashions, for the last six months. I've no doubt the unwonted exertion will do you good, and I'm quite willing to confess you may be in the right, and I in the wrong—though remember, I haven't said anything about Guy, except that appearances were against him—yet it is better to be on the safe side, and 'think no evil.'"

Lily made a pirouette round the room as if to shake off her unwonted gravity, and alighting by Kitty Lorton's side, laid her hand caressingly on her shoulder.

"Busy, as usual, little mouse?" she said gently. "You are a continual reproach to my idleness. I feel like the butterfly who tried to beguile the industrious bee into playing with her—*do* come and talk to me and amuse me."

But Kitty shook off the hand that would have caressed her, and rose abruptly.

"I am busy," she said, coldly, and crossed over to Mrs. Hoare's side.

"Will this do?" she asked gently, holding out the lace for inspection; "it seems all right now."

"Oh yes, very nice, very nice indeed—so good of you, Miss Lorton," said Mrs. Hoare, scarcely looking at it.

"Perhaps you would like me to finish this piece?"

"If you would—but won't it be a great trouble to you?"

"I shall like to do it for you," said Kitty, quietly, and she turned and went out of the room, feeling, for the first time in her life, as if she almost loved Mrs. Hoare—as if it was a pleasure even to do that wearisome lace-work for her. Had she not

made herself Guy's champion, and defended him against those cruel slanders, while Lily had made herself their mouthpiece? Kitty felt half ashamed of herself for feeling so angry with Lily.

What right had she to be angry—she who had once, long ago, done Guy Lawrence such injustice? She was ashamed of her own impatience, too; she, who thought she was learning to be patient and long-suffering, had broken down at the first trial. But it was hard to have to sit still and hear Guy Lawrence maligned, and not be able to say a word in his defence. Only because she had once loved him, only because she respected him so, and knew him to be so worthy of respect—surely, surely not because she was so foolish and so wicked as to love him still?

"What made Kitty so cross, I wonder?" said Lily Ransford, with a look of amazement on her fair face, as the door closed. "I must have done something to offend her."

"You spoil her; governesses and servants always turn out badly when they are made too much of."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LILY RANSFORD'S description of Bertie Deverell's appearance was not an exaggerated one. The six months that had elapsed since Guy had visited him in his illness had not obliterated the traces of that illness.

See him now, as he stands talking to Bentham in the enclosure of the stand at Porchefontaine. Worn and haggard, he looks truly far older than his years; there is a defiant recklessness in the blue eyes that were once so bright and honest; and a certain dare-devilry about him, that is a painful exaggeration of his old *débonnair* manner.

"Not plunging, eh, Bertie?" said Bentham, who had only just joined him. "I thought you had cut this sort of thing."

"So I have, nearly," answered Bertie, with a careless laugh, knocking the ash off his cigar; "but I've returned to my early love to-day, because she promises to be kind to me."

"Don't trust her then; one's loves always do beckon a fellow in that sort of fashion, to humbug him when he's fool enough to respond."

"A highly philosophical growl; but this is really a good thing, I know."

"What is it?"

"Pelleas for the Prix de Haras; belongs to Alverstoke; won at Croydon last year, and ran a good second to Clincher in the Grand National. Bede's to ride, too—best gentleman jock in the world."

"Fleurette seems to be fancied by the French stable, and they are getting awfully knowing now; they say, too, that the Count has backed her heavily."

"Oh, yes; that goes for nothing. Fleurette belongs really to a 'certain high personage,' as the papers say, and he has had the 'pot put on' to make the French mare and *le sport* generally popular in France. Part of his policy, you know, keeps them out of mischief. Pelleas can give this Fleurette pounds."

"Think so? Well, we shall see; haven't backed him for much; have you?"

"Nothing very enormous. Couldn't have got on at all, hardly, at a little affair like this, but De Longueville, and two or three other fellows from the Jockey Club, are here. I shall win a good stake, though. The fact is, you know, in spite of all my strict economy, and that sort of thing, I've got deucedly hard up. Don't know how it is—believe if I were dropped in the middle of a desert, where I couldn't spend a penny, I should get hard up. Well, I don't want to draw upon Guy again, he behaved so awfully well last time; so, hearing this 'tip,' I thought I would drive out, and win enough to set me up again—*voilà tout*, as they say here. But we shall miss the start; let's go on the stand."

Porchefontaine, the earliest racing fixture of the year in

France, is a small third-rate meeting, which serves, however, to attract most of the sporting Englishmen that are in Paris for the season; indeed, the shouts of "Three to one—bar one," completely drown the excited cries of "*Combien contre Fleurette?*" from the Gallic "fancy."

Now they are off! Pelleas shaking himself free of his horses in the first few strides, his fine sweeping action keeping him clear without any apparent effort. In this order he and Fleurette run, clearing all obstacles without a mistake, until they are five hundred yards from the winning post. And now the mare seems to draw upon the English crack, slowly but surely Pelleas' rider sees the danger, and does all that cool judgment and skilful riding can do to keep his lead, the gallant brute responding to his call by struggling gamely to shake off his rival. But it is all useless, the mare reaches his girths, now takes the last fence neck-and-neck with him, and now gallops in a winner by a length, amidst the waving of handkerchiefs by the elaborately toiletted occupants of the stand, and frantic gesticulations of delight from their *chers amis*.

Bertie closed his glass with an exclamation of annoyance.

"So much for your 'good thing,' Bertie," said Bentham, as Fleurette's number was hoisted.

"It is a sell. I was told Pelleas was a 'moral.'"

"Pshaw! I don't believe in 'morals.'"

"That's because you haven't any."

"Quite true, I'm happy to say; especially as you have proved that they are not such 'good things' after all." Then, as Leath sauntered up, "Let in the hole, eh?"

"Yes, by Jove! ah, Bentham, you here? How long have you been in Paris?"

"Came over yesterday. Saw that cad Pearce; he told me you and Bertie were at the Grand, so I put up there. Last night at the table d'hôte—you fellows didn't show, by the bye—a man told me of these races, so as I knew that anything in the way of pigskin or petticoats is a sure draw for Master Bertie, I thought I'd come and look for you."

"Going to stop long?"

"Only a fortnight or so, for change of air."

"Deuced little air you'll get except night air, if you have much to do with Bertie. What are you going to do to-night?"

"Dine," answered Bentham.

"*Après*?"

"My dear fellow, dinner in Paris always employs me till bed-time. I never hurry it—destroys the enjoyment, and ruins one's digestion. The only *après* for me will be a small cup of café noir, a cigar, and then to perch."

"Bentham goes in for beauty sleep; we don't require that sort of thing, eh, Bertie? But look here, there's a bal d'opéra at the Gymnase to-night, it's always good fun—let's go."

"Not I, thank you," answered Bentham.

"You'll come, Bertie?"

"Oh, yes, one must do something. May as well go there as anywhere. Going to bet a five-franc piece on this race? They'll think you a reckless gambler if you invest more."

That evening Bertie and Leath went to the Gymnase.

The bal d'opéra was nearly over. It was like all other masked balls in Paris, and unlike any of the miserable, spiritless imitations that are attempted in London. The decorations, the brilliant glare of gas-lamps, the well-trained orchestra, and all the minor accessories were the same; but here in Paris the superb costumes showed a taste for artistic blending of color and picturesque effect which was as strong a contrast to the tawdry, ill-fitting, awkward imitations that are seen at an English bal masqué, as the untranslatable Parisian *élan* and *chic* are to the senseless, meaningless wit which in England displays itself only in squirting scent into the eyes of unsuspecting passers-by, or by offering unprovoked insult for the sole object of raising that most cherished of all institutions to the youth of England—a "row."

The orchestra was playing the last dance; the soft strains of

Gungl's Krolsbalklange Valse rose above the merry laughter and the gay prattle of the crowds of dominoes, *débardeurs*, *coryphées*, *princes au théâtre*, and the thousand and one other characters that made up the crowd.

It was a brilliant picture, this phantasmagoria of brightly-colored, moving forms. Yes, reader, truly an assemblage of immorality and vice in almost all its phases—no doubt of that; but still a sight to be looked upon just once in a lifetime, to leave no taint of its iniquity, but only a dreamy remembrance in after years as of a scene from some enchantment story in the Arabian Nights.

Bertie was leaning against a statue, looking on with a careless, slightly *ennuyé*, air, paying little heed to what was going on around him.

"Eh donc!" said a voice by his side. "How sad you are. Look at this rose—it is beautiful—it is the emblem of love. Will you not buy it?"

Bertie turned his head to the speaker. She was a bright-faced brunette, *aux yeux noirs*, dressed as a flower girl. As she spoke she took a rose from her basket and held it up to him with a coquettish smile.

"Love that is bought is always worthless," answered Bertie, in tolerably fair French. "Have you none to give away, *mam'selle*?"

"You would not value it the more—men never do. They gather the rose and revel in its fragrance, and when they tire of its sweetness they cast it away as a worthless weed."

"You can have had no such bitter experience."

"Quell' innocence," answered the girl, with a careless laugh. "No experience? Plenty of it; but I'm a hardy plant, and when I'm cast aside I always manage to take root again."

"It would be a ruthless hand that could harm so fair a flower as you, *ma belle*."

"Yes, and a bold one too, for it would feel my thorns. Ah! here comes Jules. *Comment s'va, mon cher?*"

The individual addressed was a big, broad-shouldered, beetle-

browed, olive-complexioned man, dressed in a very elaborate evening dress. He approached with a scowl, and after bestowing an insolent look on Bertie, turned to the girl.

"You seem determined to avoid me," he growled.

"Pardieu! yes; one finds pleasanter companions elsewhere."

"Is this one of them?" sneered the Frenchman, with a toss of his head towards Bertie; then turning to him, he added contemptuously, "M'sieu looks as if his head was empty of brains. N'importe, so long as his pockets are full of money. Nothing speaks so eloquently to mam'selle here as the chink of gold."

"Brutes are taught to comprehend the eloquence of a horse-whip—you would understand me in a single lesson."

"You! Mon Dieu!" cried the fellow, dancing about in an excited way, "you horsewhip me—ouf!"

And with an insulting gesture he snapped his fingers in Bertie's face. The next moment he was sprawling on the floor, from a well-directed blow between the eyes.

By this time a considerable crowd had assembled—the Frenchman picked himself up and was preparing to attack Bertie.

"Are you going to thrash him, old fellow?" asked Leath, who at that moment joined him.

"Most certainly."

They were about to engage, when a man, stepping from the crowd, placed his hand before Bertie.

"Pardon me," he said in English, "this must not go on."

Bertie turned to the speaker. He was a tall, strikingly handsome, aristocratic-looking man, with dark piercing eyes, short black hair streaked with gray, a heavy pointed mustache and imperial. He was dressed in admirably fitting evening dress, spoke with scarcely any foreign accent, and altogether his calm impassive manner stamped him with an unmistakable air of breeding. But with all this there was an indescribable something in his glance that would have made a keen observer distrustful of him.

"Why do you interfere?" asked Bertie coldly, turning to him impatiently, while the crowd loudly expressed their disapproval of the stranger's pacific intentions. "You could not have seen what passed."

"I saw it all, but a gentleman does not fight with such a fellow as this, it would do him too much honor."

"This man is a stranger to me."

"Exactly, monsieur;" he then added in French, looking at the man, "but he is not so to me. He was once the marker of a billiard room, in the Rue Chaussée—he is now a well-known bully."

The crestfallen object of his remarks, after scowling malignantly at his denouncer, and muttering an oath or two through his mustache, sneaked away, the crowd dispersed, and the stranger was left with Bertie and Leath.

"Thank you for showing up that fellow," said Bertie as they all turned towards the door. "I really mistook him for a gentleman."

"Did you?" answered the stranger with a slight laugh. "I don't think I should. I've unfailing instinct in that respect. As for that blackguard who insulted you, he is notorious. He would never attempt it with any one but a foreigner. You do not live in Paris, of course?"

"No, I came over a fortnight ago."

"Only a fortnight ago; then a month of your existence has been lost. I marvel that any man can live in your winter fogs, with Paris at the height of its season within a few hours' journey. Where are you staying?"

"At the Grand."

"You go in my direction then. Will you try one of these cigars? I get them through the embassy from Havana. What did you think of the ball?"

"One of the best I have ever seen."

"Yes, it was a very good one. I've seen bals d'opéra at almost every capital in Europe, I believe; but they were very tame, almost solemn at some places—everywhere but in Paris."

"It's nearly a year since I went to a bal masqué," chimed in Leath; "at Covent Garden, you know—wasn't half bad, I assure you."

"You English don't understand that kind of thing. To me there is something ludicrous in the way you all walk about, and stare at one another. You know nothing of the art of creating pleasure, you know little of how to enjoy it. Not that it matters much: London is the mint where money is made; Paris is the mart where pleasure is bought; it is simply a matter of supply and demand, and so long as the city of cities stands, she will not want for customers. These are my rooms. Will you come in? I can offer you some very good curaçoa."

Bertie and Leath accepted the stranger's invitation, and followed him into his rooms, a superbly furnished flat, "*au troisième*" in the Rue —.

A most amusing host they found him, as they sat smoking and listening to his anecdotes. There seemed to be scarcely a habitable place he had not visited, or a person of note in any of them of whom he had not some piquant story to tell. The mysteries of racing stables, choice *esclandres* of half the beauties in Paris or London, intrigues of the stage, and *historiettes* of its brightest stars, all were touched upon, and it was not till past six o'clock that Bertie and Leath took their leave, after having made an appointment to dine at Meurice's with their new acquaintance on the following evening.

"You will call here for me?"

"Yes," answered Bertie; "but who shall I inquire for?"

"The Count Rosetti."

"*Au revoir!* then, Count, till seven o'clock to-morrow."

The following, or rather the same, morning, about twelve o'clock, Rosetti, attired in an embroidered dressing-gown and elaborately worked Turkish slippers, was seated at his breakfast-table, indulging in a repast of kidneys and claret, and reading the newspaper. When he had finished he lighted a cigarette, and then, opening the drawer of a small cabinet, took

from it a pack of cards. Seating himself at the table, he proceeded to cut them, then having cut them, went through the act of turning up, each time producing a king. When he had gone through this performance a few times, he practised other tricks, until he seemed quite satisfied with the result of his experiments.

Presently the door opened, and a man entered.

"Ah, Pearce," said Rosetti, with a wave of his hand, "you want to know whether I have marked the quarry?"

"Not exactly," answered Harvey Pearce, for it was he. "I know that already; I saw you leave the theatre together, and—"

"And when the game is once in my grip, I don't often let it slip through my fingers. That's what you would say, is it not, *mon cher*? But tell me about these friends of yours—they are rich?"

"No—haven't a franc between them, except what they raise from the Jews."

"Why, I thought you said—"

"That Deverell was a pigeon worth plucking. Yes, so he is,—thanks to his brother, who's got plenty of money, and will part with it freely to keep his brother out of trouble."

"Ah, that's better still. It's astonishing how liberal people are with what is not their own. This Deverell and his friend are going to dine with me to-night."

"Will you want me?"

"No, not the first night; it doesn't do to flush the covey until you're sure it's within easy range. Never attempt to land your fish until it's properly played. By the bye, I've just had a cheque for two hundred odd from young Crichton, to redeem his I. O. U."

"No more to be done in that quarter: he's clean gone—had to fly no end of stiff to raise this money."

"How do you know this?"

"From Mo Davis, who is now in Paris. Asked me if I thought him good for three hundred and fifty pounds. Mo and I are old friends—put many a good thing in each other's way.

He tells me that our friend, Bertie Deverell, too, has been raising the wind—borrowed a monkey only yesterday."

"Dame! that looks as if he's pressed for money."

"Yes."

"And he may become cautious."

"Oh, no; Bertie Deverell cautious! It isn't in him. He has lost this money at Porchefontaine, and at the first chance he'll take a blind plunge to recoup himself."

"Eh bien! We'll give him one. Have some curaçoa, mon ami, or a brandy-and-seltzer. What a wasted man you are, Pearce!"

"Think so? Well, I suppose I have missed my tip somehow at some time."

"Pardieu! yes. If your merits had been recognized, you'd have been a Chancellor of the Exchequer. I never knew such talent for financiering and diplomacy combined. You are just the man for the post—not overburdened with conscientious scruples."

Harvey Pearce's reappearance on the scene in connection with the Count Rosetti is easily explained.

At the time of the Aylesbury steeple-chase he was living entirely on the doubtful profits that accrued from betting. Having a rather extensive acquaintance amongst the men of his old university, for some time he made a very fair living by this means. His *modus operandi* was extremely simple. Looked upon as a good judge in racing matters, as he always was by the "horsey" set at Oxford, his "tips" were eagerly sought and unhesitatingly acted upon. But he always supplemented his advice by suggesting a certain book-maker as a "safe man" to make their outlays with. The collusion was never suspected; the lion and the jackal shared the profits, laughing in their sleeves the while at the gullibility of their prey. But supplies from these sources, though abundant enough at first, soon began to fail. It is true that occasionally one of the "good things" devised by Pearce came off—in which case he had generally incigarette, and thould be the result, and took care to assure the

confederacy against loss; but the greatest certainties, on which the largest "pots" had been put, were so often upset through some "unaccountable mystery," some most extraordinary mistake, that Pearce's disciples began to lose faith in their prophet, and forbore to follow up the bad luck that had attended his selections.

From the turf, Pearce turned his talents to account at the gaming-table. One great advantage was on his side—he was not hampered by any conscientious scruples. His only consideration was to avoid detection. He saw that with the aid of an accomplice large sums might be won by cards at the clubs of which he was a member, for his character was as yet unsuspected. Accident soon gave him the opportunity he was seeking.

One night he was present at a supper-party given by a certain Captain Legge, who called himself a gentleman jockey, but whose sole income was derived from the fees he received *sub rosa* for his mounts, and the rather considerable sums that were to be made in other ways in connection with his "sport." Amongst the guests was Count Rosetti, who, after supper, commenced playing écarté with the Earl of Tottenham—a fair-haired, soft-looking youth of two-and-twenty.

The others, with the exception of Pearce, played at loo; but he, yielding to an unaccountable inclination, sat by the écarté table, and without appearing to bestow more than ordinary interest on the game, narrowly watched the Count. He was soon convinced of what he had instinctively suspected. The Count, in dealing, turned a king; it was adroitly done, but not with sufficient neatness to prevent Pearce seeing that it was drawn from the bottom of the pack, where it had, of course, been placed by some clever legerdemain on the part of the dealer. Pearce said nothing, but waited till the Count was going, and took his leave at the same time. The Count's rooms were in Pall Mall—Pearce's in Sackville Street; and so they walked together.

"That little muff, Tottenham, is going the pace, I expect," said Pearce, when they had gone some distance. "He'll be

dipping his ancestral acres in mortgages before he's much older, I'll bet."

"Do you think so?" answered the Count, throwing away the end of his cigarette. "He's immensely rich—so rich that I should say he finds it difficult to spend his income."

"Without assistance, perhaps." Then, after a short pause, "You must have been a large winner to-night? What a heap of money might be won from him!"

"Possibly; but one cannot control one's luck."

"But one might be independent of it."

"What do you mean?" asked the Count, casting a side-long glance at Pearce.

"Suppose one could see his cards, for instance; or, what is the same thing, knew what he held through a confederate?"

The Count stopped short, and turned to Pearce with an indignant air.

"Sir, that would be cheating."

"Of course. What then?"

"That it is as difficult to comprehend such a suggestion coming from a gentleman as it is impossible to suppose that one could be guilty of it."

Pearce turned his head and looked quietly at the Count.

"Do you think it more impossible in a gentleman than the stale old trick called '*couper le roi*'?"

The Count started, but was too old a hand to betray himself.

"I really don't understand you, sir," he said, in a frigid tone. "I presume you don't dare—"

"Ah, don't excite yourself, Count; I'm not the man to spoil sport. I saw you turn the king to-night in a way that some opponents might object to. It was cleverly done, but it seemed to me that after all it's a clumsy trick, and might lead to an awkward scene. But with an obliging friend behind your opponent's chair, by George! you could skin the lamb as safely and easily as possible."

The Count listened to all he said. At first he thought of

resenting the charge, for he knew that it could not be proved; but then he remembered that the stigma of the accusation alone would be sufficient to ruin his chances of future success, and that, after all, there was much good sense in Pearce's suggestion. So he dropped his tone of indignation, and they then and there formed an offensive alliance, which worked so well both in London and Paris, that it had continued and flourished ever since.

Pearce had seen Bertie Deverell's name amongst the arrivals, and it occurred to him that he might be a pigeon worth their plucking. He knew Bertie's passion for gambling, and he had a shrewd idea that, however large the sums that might be lost by Bertie, they would be paid by Guy Lawrence, rather than his brother's name should suffer. Pearce and the Count never appeared together as friends; it might have led to awkward suspicions. It was planned, therefore, that the Count, to whom Bertie had been pointed out by Pearce, should go to the bal d'opéra, on the chance of meeting his intended victim, and seize any opportunity that chance might present to make his acquaintance. How he succeeded is already known.

The dinner at Meurice's—a *recherché* little affair, owing as much to the Count's judgment in the choice of the *ménu* as to the skill of the *chef*—was a great success.

The host was very brilliant—a wonderful gift he had, certainly, of being agreeable. No man could read the characters of his guests more correctly, or show greater tact in the choice of such topics as were likely to amuse. He talked well, had travelled much, knew, or affected to know, everybody and everything, from the secret of some French state intrigue that had puzzled all Europe, to the true and veritable particulars of an English divorce case that was destined to be the talk of London during the coming season. Bertie wondered who he could be, but though the Count had led him to speak of himself and his connections, he had related little of his own history, beyond the fact that he was an Italian refugee, banished for political reasons.

After dinner the Count proposed that they should adjourn to his room, and play a quiet game of *écarté*, for something moderate in the form of stakes. Nothing Bertie would like better. So they lighted their cigars and set out. The Count was loud in his praises of Bertie's skill; declared he was no match for him; and when they separated, about two in the morning, handed him twenty-five pounds, the balance of the stakes, with a courteously expressed hope that he might soon have the pleasure of taking his revenge.

When Bertie woke in the morning he felt on very good terms with himself and the world. He was free from all entanglements, pecuniary and amatory. Certainly, he had lost more than was agreeable at Porchefontaine, but that was a trifle comparatively. All his big debts were paid; his old passion for Celia had quite burnt out; and, like all spoilt favorites of fortune, Bertie flattered himself that all the good things he enjoyed were due rather to his own sound sense, and the power of will with which he shaped his destinies, than to the fact that life was made so pleasant for him that he had only to take it as it came, and in its enjoyment forget the one who rescued him from its cares.

Some dim feeling of this kind, too slight to cause him any remorse, was yet sufficient to remind him that for months past he had not written to Guy. He had received a letter from Naples some time before, but somehow one thing and another had turned up, and he never had time to answer it.

He would write to Guy that very day, not that he knew exactly what to write about—he was never a brilliant letter-writer—but he could give some sort of account of his doings in Paris. He wouldn't mention the Porchefontaine affair, there was no occasion to bother about that. It was awfully jolly in Paris. So many people that Guy knew—the Domvilles, the Hoares—by Jove! a deuced good idea! Why not try to get him to come to Paris? and—yes, of course—bring Celia with him. People had given up talking about that affair long ago. And after all, though it seemed strange at the time, there was

nothing so *very* extraordinary in Guy's marrying an actress. Some of the best blood in England—pshaw! He would write at once. Poor old Guy, he *was* a good fellow, and no mistake; he would be so pleased, too, at being wanted. Then, there was the Count, by the bye; such an awfully clever fellow, had travelled so much, and knew such a deuce of a lot. He would just suit Guy; they'd hit it off exactly. Splendid idea, the more he thought of it. Why hadn't it occurred to him before? And so Bertie, in his usual impetuous way, without considering the matter further, dashed off a letter, which was a tolerably exact repetition of the reflections which led to it.

CHAPTER XXXIV.



FAIR away from the clamor and bustle of Paris, far away under sweet southern skies, Guy Lawrence lived with his wife.

Amid beautiful surroundings, fair weather, wonderful scenery, their lives seemed the very essence of calm and tranquil happiness.

His only wish seemed to be to get away from the world, and she had said, and said truly, that she was content to go anywhere with him; and as she never complained, never seemed to grow weary of the quietude, never seemed to miss the excitement and admiration and flattery that had once been meat and drink to her, he ceased to trouble himself with the fear that she would be discontented with her new life, and took it for granted that she was, as she said, perfectly happy.

And though she smiled as she said it, and looking up into his face half believed it true—for how could she help being perfectly happy now she was his wife, now she had the right to stay with him forever,—there was a pain in her heart, which would not be stifled, a longing which would not be satisfied.

For the calm of her life was on the surface only, and below it, deeply hidden, surged the well-springs of heart-sickness and the weariness of hopes unfulfilled.

Day after day, month after month, she had hoped and hoped in vain, and now despair was beginning to thrust out hope.

She had married Guy Lawrence knowing that he did not love her, but believing that her own great love must win his. Love changed her whole nature. She who was so cold, almost cruel to every one else, loved him so absorbingly that she almost lost her identity. She who had been so violent and impatient, set herself patiently and persistently to win his love. She was beautiful, and he who took such pleasure in beauty would surely grow to take some pride and pleasure in hers. She had at least one talent. She could sing—she would draw out his heart and melt his coldness with her music. She would be always quiet and satisfied, always gentle and cheerful, and he would love her because she was trying to grow good for his sake. But he never seemed to notice her looks, only asked her to sing out of politeness, and then thanked her in a way that told her how little he had been really listening, and believed so thoroughly that he had done his best to please her, and that she was satisfied and happy, that all her gentle endurance passed unnoticed by him.

But though she was weary of waiting and watching for the love which never came, though she was sick with the sickness of hope deferred, she never complained, and Guy knew nothing of the storm that was swelling beneath the calm, quiet manner. Perhaps it would have been better if he had known some of the trouble that was in her heart, he would have understood her better, and if there had been more confidence between them there might have been more love. But she held her peace, and never cried out, though hope was turning to despair. She had attained the desire of her life. Heart and soul and powerful will she had set on marrying the man whom she loved with an intensity of love almost inconceivable in a woman less violent and passionate than this southern-born beauty. To be always

near him, within sight of his face, within sound of his voice, had seemed to her then such wonderful, almost incredible happiness; but now, in the bitterness of her despair—now, when she was forced to understand that she, with all her gifts, could not win the love of her husband, she almost felt that it would have been better to let him go away from her forever, than to have chosen to be daily and hourly in his presence, tortured by his coldness, maddened by the thought of what happiness might be hers if he loved her.

At first Guy found his married life a very uneasy one. Knowing how little love he had for the woman he had made his wife, bitterly conscious of his own failing towards her, he had sought to atone to her by his anxious assiduity, by his devoted attention and tender courtesy. He had tried to amuse her, to talk to her and entertain her, but these very efforts made him constrained in her presence. There was none of the easy familiarity that exists between married people who love each other; he treated her more as a guest to whom he wished to show every consideration, than as his wife, his nearest and dearest. And though Celia said nothing, she fretted and chafed at his manner, and knew too well that his efforts to please her wanted the true ring of love. They were too conscious, too strained at. His very courtesy galled her, he would never have been so over polite to a woman he loved—better that he should have quarrelled with her, abused her, reproached her, anything, than that he should treat her with this overstrained consideration—like a stranger rather than a wife; she longed for anything to break down this barrier of cold formality that existed between them, anything that should bring her nearer to him and give her an excuse for weeping out all the passion of wounded love that was in her heart.

But she never complained or reproached him—she felt that she had no right, and she feared to grieve him and make him repent his marriage with her—and Guy gradually lost his uneasiness about her: he was very thankful that she at least was happy, that she did not detect any want in him or feel how

different he might have been had he loved her, and little by little the constraint he had felt in her presence wore off; it became so natural to him to see her always near him that he even forgot she was there, and would sit for hours almost silent over his painting, so absorbed in thought that he seemed perfectly oblivious of the woman who was grieving and fretting at his coldness.

Life settled down into a dead calm for Guy Lawrence, the fears which had at first troubled him wore off, the excitement was over, and the reaction had come. Only a long vista of years wherein there could be no hope or prospect of change—a weary future of everlasting sameness stretched out before him. Bound by an indissoluble tie; sworn to eternal fidelity and tenderness to one woman; condemned to crush and smother the love he bore another; oppressed by a sense of duties he could only fulfil in the letter, and not in the spirit; terribly conscious of his own shortcomings, not in deed, but in heart, towards the wife who was so good and loving to him, Guy grew grave and silent, his face wore an habitual look of melancholy, and he seemed suffering from a depression which he could not shake off.

In a large room—that had something of the appearance of an artist's studio, and something of an ordinary sitting-room, with long windows thrown wide open (for though it was winter everywhere else it seemed always summer in this fair Italian land), a queer, nondescript sort of room, with books tossed carelessly about or piled up everywhere where books could possibly be; with pictures on the walls and pictures on the floor with their faces to the wall; with a grand piano and a litter of music in one corner, and a heterogeneous mass of artist's tools—brushes and paints, and canvas-covered frames, in another—Guy sat one morning painting, and his wife sat a little distance from him, reading, no—not reading, but with a book lying open in her lap, for her eyes were far oftener fixed on his face than on the page before her. It was strange to note the change which a year and a-half had made in this woman—Guy Lawrence's wife. Still beautiful she was, but her beauty was almost

another type than that for which the actress, Estelle, had been famous. The glorious brilliancy of color had not faded, but was no longer the most conspicuous part of her face, the passionate fire of her eyes was quenched, they that had once so vividly flashed scorn and love were drooping now and weariful and the old imperious haughtiness was subdued. Guy was always painting now, it seemed to be the only occupation in which he had not ceased to take an interest; and Celia, with her book as a shield for her idleness, used to sit watching him, beating out her heart with longing and impatience.

Guy looked up suddenly from his work.

"Celia, will you help me?"

Her face brightened and she sprang eagerly forward at the sound of his voice.

"How can I, Guy?"

"I am in a difficulty about this shadow; will you stand so—no, a little more to the right, with the light on the left side of your face—now bring your head round nearly full—stay, I'll place you."

He got up and began arranging her as he wished her to stand, gazing at her about, moving her face to catch the light, in a careless, business-like way; threw back his head, looked at her with the eye of an artist, not of a lover, and returned to his seat with an injunction "not to move."

She obeyed, and though a shadow of disappointment dimmed her eyes, she stood with her head thrown back and her lips parted in a smile, as she had often stood before for the same picture; and Guy became again absorbed in his work, and gazing at her closely, striving in vain to rival the peach-like bloom, the warm southern glow of her cheeks, trying to out-do nature by his art, dwelling with no lingering look of fondness on her brilliant beauty, but wrapt in admiration for its artistic splendor, gazed on her with the piercing scrutiny of a painter who sees in his model only the ideal of his picture, not with the silent rapture of a husband inwardly rejoicing in the object of his love.

The subject of this, his last painting, on which he had spent much time and labor, was a peculiar one.

The scene was the interior of a peasant's cottage—a low-roofed room with rough-hewn rafters, and a small lattice window, a ragged curtain pinned across it. On a low bed, the figure of a girl lying dead. One ray of sunlight piercing through the gloom lights up bright gold glints in the mass of chestnut hair that falls in heavy waves over the white sheet, and glorifies the fair dead face. Through an open door to the right is visible the figure of a woman who is passing—a peasant returning from work with a child perched upon her shoulder. One arm is raised, holding a bunch of grapes over the child's head; her beautiful face is thrown back, and, upturned, catches the full light of the sun; her lips are parted in a smile, her perfect figure revealed by her simple dress, her short petticoat and laced bodice, and her white bosom only half hidden by the bright-colored handkerchief. A glorious embodiment of life—overflowing, brilliant, animal life; health and strength are depicted in every line of the supple figure and the laughing, radiant face; and beyond in the distance the landscape stretched, shining and golden, and rich-tinted under the burning sun. But the wonder, the strangeness of the picture lay in the contrast between the two figures—one, in the awful hush of death, with a sublime tranquillity on her sweet white face—both so near and yet so unconscious of each other's presence.

Guy Lawrence had called it "Life and Death." All the power, all the talent he possessed he had expended in the working out of this strange imagination. And the effect was so vivid and startling that it was almost terrible.

Life seemed mocking death, and death seemed rebuking life.

If this picture had ever been finished and exhibited, it would have gained for Guy fame as a great artist, for it bore the stamp of a master-hand in the wonderful coloring, the perfect conception of form, and exquisite tenderness and delicacy of detail. But it was destined never to be finished.

He seemed to have a great love for the beauty his genius had called into life. Day after day he had spent over it, painting with an intenseness and patience he had never displayed before.

The girl's face was finished—to the woman's there remained but a few finishing touches to be put, and part of the drapery and the interior of the room was incomplete.

Celia had been his model for the figure of "Life," and though Guy had not intended the face for a likeness, unconsciously the brilliant, glowing, voluptuous beauty had grown into a portrait of his wife.

And the other face, the fair, tender, dead face he had painted from memory.

"Why didn't you tell me you needed me before, Guy?" said Celia, speaking without turning her head or moving her eyes.

"I thought I could get on without you now. You have been a very patient model, but I know it's weary work."

"I am glad if I can be of any good to you, if it is only in this," she answered; "I am so idle—and so useless."

"Useless? No. You embody the beauty, I only try to delineate it," answered Guy, with rather studied politeness. And then there was silence, and he became again absorbed in the perfecting of his work. Suddenly he threw down his brush and his palette, and turned to the window.

"What is it?" asked Celia, changing her attitude for the first time.

"Letters."

That was answer enough: she knew how eagerly Guy looked for letters from home, how week after week he had wearily and vainly waited for tidings from Bertie; and when, after a moment's anxious expectation, a letter was placed in his hand, she saw by the sudden lighting up of his face who it was from, and without a word she took up her book and went back to her seat. From there she watched him as he read, saw the smile that dawned upon his lips; saw him, unconscious of her scrutiny, turn when he had reached the end and glance over it

again—heard him stifle a sigh as, folding it up, he put it in his pocket, and, with his arms crossed and his head bent, walked slowly up and down the room deep in thought. She saw the old depression steal gradually over his face again, the momentary brightening disappear, saw him rouse himself with an effort from his fit of abstraction, and go quietly back to his work. She rose up and went to his side.

“Is Bertie quite well, Guy?”

“Well? Oh, yes, he writes in very good spirits. He is in Paris, enjoying himself wonderfully.”

“Doesn’t he speak of coming to see you?”

“No; on the contrary, he wants me to go and see him—but that of course is out of the question.”

There was a moment’s pause. Celia understood the meaning of the sigh she had heard, knew that Guy had not been able to resign the thought of seeing his brother without a sharp pang of regret. Gently, yet persistently, she set herself to learn all the contents of the letter, and then to persuade him to accept the invitation it had conveyed.

“I cannot go, Celia. I could not leave you, and I—”

“You do not want to take me to Paris. I know that, Guy,” she returned with a touch of her former pride. “Nothing could induce me to go. It could not be more painful for you to be ashamed of me, than for me to know that you were.” Then seeing him look hurt she suddenly melted. “Oh, Guy, forgive me. I know I am wronging you. I know that it is only that you fear to see me pained by the slights your grand friends and relations would throw upon me—and you are right. I am happier here.”

“I think you are, Celia, upon my honor I do; but all the same, I would take you anywhere you would like to go.”

“But you will go only for a few days to see Bertie; he will be hurt if you do not.”

And Celia pleaded and persuaded till Guy, longing to see his brother, yielded.

“Though I can’t help feeling it is selfish to leave you,

Celia, and I ought to be content to know that Bertie is well and happy without seeing him; and yet," he added to himself, "it is a pleasure to know that I shall have a glimpse of him."

The thought of that coming pleasure made Guy's face brighter during the day that preceded his departure than it had been for many a weary month; and Celia, though she had striven so unselfishly to induce him to go, stifled many bitter heart pangs as she noticed the gladness that all her love had not power to call forth.

Looking into her face as the bright sunlight streamed on it when she stood in the verandah bidding him good-by, Guy Lawrence noted the shadow that dimmed its brightness, and his eager anticipations were instantly forgotten in self-reproach.

"Celia, you shouldn't have induced me to go. You don't like to be left alone. It is not too late—say one word and I will stay."

Could she only have known how through all future years the remembrance of his words would haunt her and goad her with a frenzy of regret, till, in the insanity of despair, she would reproach herself bitterly, remorsefully, as the cause of the trouble that would have been averted if she had spoken one word, and bid him stay.

But she did not. She only laid her hand lovingly on his shoulder, and said smilingly, "It seems quite silly to make so much fuss about losing you for one week. How people would laugh at me. Go, mio caro, you will be late."

And Guy, kissing her tenderly, bade her good-by and turned and left her; but when he had reached the last step and was giving some final direction to his man, he heard her voice calling him, and hurrying back to her found her standing where he had left her. With a strangely agitated face she laid her arms quietly round his neck.

"Oh, my darling, don't think me foolish—some unaccountable presentiment came over me," and her voice was hushed and tremulous. "Kiss me, Guy, once more. Have I been a

good wife to you?" And the tears welled up into her eyes: she looked pleadingly into his.

Guy looked sadly down into the troubled face.

"A good wife to me, Celia? You don't know how your words reproach me. God knows how little I deserve all your goodness." And he pressed her tenderly to him. "Now good-by again, dear, drive away all silly presentiments and dry up your tears, or your eyes won't have lost their redness before I return." And kissing her again, with a gay smile and farewell wave of the hand, Guy jumped into the carriage and was gone.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BERTIE DEVERELL was stretched on a sofa in his room, smoking a cigar and reading a novel. He had been for a drive in the Bois, looked in at the Jockey Club for half an hour, and then come home for his siesta before he dressed for dinner.

"Wonder if the fellow who wrote this knows Leoni," he thought, laying down his book to relight his cigar; "that Jew is meant for him, I'll take my oath. Think I could put him up to a thing or two in the money-lender way—not that he doesn't know—Hullo! come in!"

The door opened, and Guy entered.

"Hullo, Guy! awfully glad you've come, dear old boy, awfully glad!" And he seized his brother's hand and shook it heartily. "So much better than burying yourself alive, as you have lately. What have you done with Celia? She has come with you?"

"No, I left her behind," replied Guy, warmly returning Bertie's greeting. "She thought it better—besides, I only intend to stay a week."

"A week! nonsense; now I've got you here I don't mean to

"Get you go off so easily. But now let's look at you," placing his hands on his brother's shoulders. "You've lost flesh, Guy; the figs and garlic of the sunny south don't agree with you, *mon frère*; we must put you into condition again before you go."

"Much obliged," answered Guy with a smile. "But how are you, young one? All right again, eh? Dropped late hours and all that?"

"Can't be such a humbug as to say I have altogether, but I'm better, decidedly better; gradually reforming, you know. Never believed in sudden conversions."

"I hope you are better. You couldn't stand the old life, Bertie; another year of it would have killed you. But tell me, who are here?"

"Oh, lots of people you know. Bentham, Leath, the Caringtons, Teddy Berkeley and his wife—got eight thousand a year with her, you know—and, oh, by the bye, the Hoares are here—staying in this hotel."

A slight exclamation escaped Guy. "The Hoares, and—anybody with them?"

"Ah, yes, of course," answered Bertie carelessly, not thinking in his egotism of the real cause of the interest Guy displayed. "Kitty Lorton is with them; but that's all right, we meet as if nothing had happened between us. She's rather stand-offish, certainly; doesn't encourage a fellow to declare himself a second time—not that I've the least idea of doing so, you know, so it's rather fortunate than otherwise. But they'll be awfully glad you've come; Clara's always asking me heaps of questions about you."

"I'll look her up to-morrow; but in the meantime, what about dinner? I'm rather hungry. I intended to have put a few figs or a sandwich or two in my pocket."

"Poor old Guy," laughed Bertie; "my '*soles au vin blanc*' and my '*faisans aux pointes d'asperges*' will be rather wasted on you, I'm afraid."

"Pearls thrown before swine, eh, Bertie? But isn't this

rather a feast, or is it my savage tastes that make it appear so?"

"No; you're quite right; I don't usually drink Rousillon—fifteen shillings a bottle—can't afford it, but I shall give you some to-night. Two or three men are coming to dine with me—Bentham, Pearce—you remember Pearce—ah, by the bye, yes, and you didn't get on with him very swimmingly the last time you met. Well, you must bury the hatchet to-night."

"Any one else?"

"Yes, a man you don't know—Count Rosetti, an awfully good fellow, a sort of Admirable Crichton; talks better, dresses better, shoots better, does everything better than any other fellow I know."

"Ah, that's the man you mentioned in your letter."

"Yes, you are sure to like him;" then looking at his watch, "By Jove! only a quarter of an hour to dress—look alive, Guy, we dine at eight."

The dinner passed off successfully: the *ménu* was unexceptionable, the wine went round freely. The Count was, if possible, more brilliant than usual, and made a most favorable impression on Guy, who always appreciated a ready wit and cultured intellect, whether he found them among the Bohemian coteries of his art acquaintances, or as was infinitely more rare, reflecting a genuine lustre on some highly ranked title.

Pearce was unusually quiet and subdued, and did not seem to hail Guy's appearance with any great delight, but Bentham met him with all his old cordiality. Like most of the men in Bertie's set he had condemned Guy's behavior in the affair of the marriage without in the least knowing the true facts of the case; but since then the good feeling that undoubtedly existed between the brothers, and the hearty sincerity with which Bertie always spoke of Guy, convinced him that there was another side to the question that the world knew nothing of, and that inexplicable as the whole matter was, Guy Lawrence was guiltless of the dishonorable conduct some imputed to him. Bentham's old liking, his old faith in him returned,

and by the warmth of his manner he seemed trying to atone for the injustice he had unwittingly done him.

But the dinner was only the prelude to what was to follow ; the real object of the party was play ; and Bertie had invited Harvey Pearce and the Count simply and solely that the latter might give him the revenge he had offered for having relieved Bertie of a rather considerable sum on a previous night. Since the meeting at the bal d'opéra Bertie and the Count had played several times. At first Bertie won, then he had varying fortune, until at last the luck seemed to have set against him, he lost all his original winnings and the Count scored a balance of something like six hundred pounds in his favor. It was to take his "revenge" for these losses that Bertie had arranged the present party.

It was rather awkward, certainly, that Guy should have turned up that night, but it could not be helped—besides, he was not a child in leading-strings, and there could be no harm in a game of *écarté*, though the stakes were somewhat high, between two well-matched players. After all he wasn't quite sure that they were so well matched, the Count was no novice, certainly, but then *écarté* was the game above all others in which he, Bertie, flattered himself he excelled. What luck the Count had had too, but of course it would turn, most likely to-night, and then he would soon wipe off his losings and perhaps stand something to the good.

With the coffee and cigars, by Bertie's directions, the card-tables were placed. Harvey Pearce preferred to look on, Bentham voted cards a bore, Guy—who concealed a feeling of uneasiness at the sight of these preparations—never played ; and so Bertie, who seemed by no means displeased that his *écarté* would be uninterrupted, seated himself ; the Count faced him, and they prepared to play.

"The usual stakes, I suppose ?" said the Count, cutting the cards.

"Oh, yes," answered Bertie, looking slightly confused. "Here, Guy, have a weed ?"

Guy lighted one of the cigars, and sauntered to an easy-chair, which he had wheeled to the side of a sofa on which Bentham had stretched himself.

The play began: the luck seemed all one-sided, and it was still against Bertie, who had only scored one game when his opponent had won five. It was not that the hands were unequal, but whenever Bertie held a small card the Count invariably retained a higher one of the same suit with which he made or saved a point.

"You never chuck the wrong one, Count," said Bertie, with a tinge of irritation in his tone, as the Count scored another game. "One would think you saw through my cards or over them."

"All luck—simply luck. Your turn presently." And he pencilled a notation in a small morocco and gold betting-book.

"Now, Deverell, go in and win," said Pearce, who was standing behind Bertie's chair. "Do you feel inclined to back your luck, Count?"

"Yes, certainly, for what—a hundred?"

"No, thank you, I can't afford so much as that, unless Deverell likes to go me halves."

"You're wrong to back a losing man," said Bertie, shuffling the cards excitedly. "I can't win a game."

"Something tells me you will win this time. Take fifty of the Count's bet? What do you say?"

"All right then—cut the cards, Count."

"Fifty with each of you, eh?" said the Count, scanning his little book. "Let me see, Deverell, the last game made exactly eight hundred."

Just then Guy happened to turn his head in the direction of the card-players, and the last words, though spoken in rather a low tone, reached his ears. "Eight hundred! Good Heavens! Surely Bertie had not lost so large a sum as eight hundred pounds to this man!" And affecting a nonchalant air he sauntered to the table and took a chair, from which he carelessly looked over the Count's hand. The game went on,

Bertie had played his last card but one, the Count had two left; everything depended on which one he played, when Guy, happening to glance at Pearce, saw him put up his hand to his mustache as if to stroke it, while at the same time a rapid look of intelligence passed from him to the Count. Guy started involuntarily. Was it possible that these two were confederates, and Pearce was making pre-arranged signs to the Count? Pshaw! what an absurd suspicion, and yet it was strange, to say the least of it, that the latter should play the right card and reserve the winning one—a heart. Guy shifted his position slightly, to command a view of all the actors in the scene, and without appearing to do so, watched them narrowly.

Two more hands were played, and nothing occurred to confirm his suspicion. Bertie making his score level to the Count's by a persistent run of good cards. The game was now four all. The cards were again dealt, and the Count stood on his hand. Three tricks had been played and it was now a most critical point of the game; if he scored another trick he would win. Bertie led a diamond—ah! again that gesture—the hand to the mustache—hurriedly too, and unnaturally. The Count threw away the king of spades. Now for Bertie's last card, upon which the game and stakes depended; it was the ten of hearts. The Count played his—it was the knave. Guy no longer had a doubt. To throw away a king and retain a knave was suspicious enough in itself, but that same sign, the hand to the mustache, and the card kept—a heart—the same as the time before.

Bertie looked flushed with a painful excitement. The Count was calmly pencilling his betting-book.

"That is eight seventy-five," he said.

Guy rose from the chair and advanced slowly to the table—a stern look was on his face, but he spoke very calmly.

"You may save yourself the trouble of booking those bets—they won't be paid."

That a scene was about to take place every one saw at once

—surprise was depicted on every face except the Count's, and he, though rather pale, lifted his eyebrows and smiled superciliously. Bertie was the first to speak.

"What the deuce do you mean, Guy?" he cried, starting to his feet, his voice almost choked with passion.

"Simply that you are being swindled. This man," pointing to Pearce, "has been making signs to his confederate here," looking at the Count. "You have been playing with a card-sharper, and he has cheated you."

"You lie!" And with a sudden bound the Count rushed at Guy; but he had met more than his match, for Guy, avoiding the blow with his left hand, seized the Count by the throat, and straining every muscle of his powerful frame, shook him once or twice, and then flung him staggering across the room.

"Don't attempt that sort of thing; I may throw you downstairs. As it is, you will be good enough to walk down—instantly," and Guy pointed to the door.

It would be difficult to describe the consternation caused by Guy's accusation and the result. Bentham had risen from his sofa and advanced towards the group. Pearce was standing at some distance biting his lips, which were ashy white. Bertie, flushed with anger, was looking from one to the other, too bewildered to speak.

The Count, perfectly livid, but quite self-possessed, drew himself up defiantly.

"You have witnessed this outrage, gentlemen," he said slowly—then with a glance at Guy, "rest assured I shall avenge it." And lighting a cigarette, he walked calmly out of the room.

Then Pearce, with a show of virtuous indignation, muttering something about expecting an apology, stalked after him.

There was silence for a moment—Bentham shrugged his shoulders, raised his eyebrows, and returned to his sofa, where he complacently blew fresh clouds from his cigar. Bertie, crestfallen at having been duped, but inwardly vowing all sorts

of summary vengeance against the Count, stood biting his lips and casting abashed glances at Guy, whose frown relaxed as he turned and spoke.

"You owe that fellow money, Bertie?"

"Yes."

"Of course you won't pay him; he's nothing but a card-sharper, and has won none of it fairly."

"What an infernal scoundrel!" said Bentham; "but I say, old fellow, are you certain you're not mistaken?"

"Perfectly certain. I haven't a doubt about it. You'll find he won't ask for the money, he knows better."

"Perhaps not," said Bertie, savagely, "but I've got a score to settle with him before—"

"Nonsense, nonsense," interrupted Guy, hastily; "he's better left alone; there's an old saying about handling pitch. You've had a narrow escape, young one—don't be taken in again."

"But he talked about avenging himself; if there's anything to be done in that way—"

"Only bluster, nothing else. You must promise me not to take any notice of this fellow—you will promise me, won't you, Bertie?"

"I'll promise you one thing; I won't seek a quarrel with him, but if he goes on with the affair and shows fight, I can't, no, hang it, Guy, even for you, I can't sport the feather."

"Very well, there's no more to be said then. A quarter past twelve: I vote we turn in. Good-night, Bentham;" then in an undertone, "Come to me to-morrow morning. Good-night, Bertie; remember your promise—keep clear of the Count."

came out, saluting him with stately dignity as he passed.

"Who was that fellow?" he asked on entering.

"That was Monsieur de Neuilly, Captain of Chasse; he has brought me a challenge from the Count."

"But you won't meet him! You can't go out with sharper!"

"The world doesn't know him as one."

"But you know it," cried Bentham in angry remonstrance. "And as for the world, he's scarcely likely to show in it."

"There I believe you're wrong," answered Guy. "He would take an opportunity of insulting me publicly, and with bringing a charge that I couldn't prove and had no pluck to resent. I must go out."

"Good God, Lawrence! are you mad! this fellow is shot."

Guy smiled slightly. "You wouldn't have me show my feather on that account."

"But you saw him cheat?"

"Yes, but no one else saw it. I could not prove the charge."

"But you won't meet a fellow you know to be a swindler?"

"Bentham," answered Guy after a moment's pause, "I'll tell you the truth. I should ~~refuse~~ ~~was~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~moment~~ ~~of~~ ~~refusing~~."

there which convinced him that further remonstrance would be useless. I shall be helping to murder you," he groaned.

"Not a word of all this must reach Bertie if it can be helped. It can do no good to tell him; he must not be present, and the suspense to him until it is over would be terrible. You will arrange everything for me, I know."

"Yes, Lawrence, but I never served a friend so unwillingly before. Good-by," and shaking hands with Guy, he left the room.

Guy went out early, leaving a note for Bertie, telling him that he was going to visit some art exhibitions. This was such a common occurrence with Guy that when, in answer to a question from Bertie, Bentham replied evasively that "Guy had not seen anything of the Count," Bertie concluded that nothing more would be heard of the affair of the previous night; that the Count, fearing to brave it out, and knowing how impossible it would be for him to remain in Paris without resenting such an accusation as Guy had brought against him, had gone away to seek fresh fields wherein to turn his talent to account.

Guy, to avoid the telling of an untruth, went to one of the numerous galleries with which Paris abounds. But though he looked at the pictures his thoughts were so full of other things he did not see them, and so, after remaining but a few minutes, he went out into the crowded streets and roamed about till late in the afternoon, when he knew Bertie would be driving, and then returned to the hotel.

He was ascending the stairs, scarcely heeding what was going on about him, when the sound of descending footsteps made him look up. It was Kitty Lorton, but so sad and pale and worn that even at this moment her changed appearance struck him. Both paused for a moment, staggered by the unexpectedness of the meeting—then Kitty, with a slight curl of her lip, bowed coldly and passed on.

When Guy reached his room and threw himself into a chair a strange chaos of thoughts crowded upon him, racking and

bewildering his brain. Was he mad—or was all this some hideous dream? Surely he could not be awake and in his senses. In a few hours he would be in the presence of death; he was no coward, and this it was that made him face the truth boldly. He knew the deadly skill of the man he was going to meet, he knew that in all human probability his aim would be fatal. And this was to be the end—a violent untimely death! After all—was there much to make him cling to life? Was this world so bright and full of happiness to him that he had cause to regret it? Would not death come almost as a friend to cut the gordian knot of all his troubles, to relieve him from the never-ceasing effort of simulating a love he could not feel, to put an end to the bitter anguish of vain regrets for the irrevocable past. Was not life made of such trials? “The gods conceal the happiness of death, that we may endure life.” Was there not truth in this thought? And yet, what might have been. That one dear face that had brightened his path in days gone by, had she been his how different would his life have been. But he had sacrificed his love and hers (a groan of anguish escaped him at the recollection) for one who had not been worthy of her, to whom she was now as nothing—her life sacrificed and his own, uselessly, to that vow by his mother’s death-bed, that vow that he had loyally kept in spite of all the ruin it had wrought. Had he done right, sternly, relentlessly, with the unyielding force of his iron will to sacrifice all others to his brother’s welfare? That wan, pale face that he had just seen rose before him, silently condemning him for the wrong he had done her in his blindness, humiliating him, wounding him more deeply than the bitterest words by its contemptuous, scornful haughtiness. He knew she had loved him once, and though she had since declared that her love had passed away, incapable as he was of egotism, he felt that her careworn face was the outward sign of a barren life, of the canker-worm of a blighted love, a love that he had held dearer than all else in the world, but had uselessly sacrificed in his blind determination to be loyal to his vow.

Rising from his chair he walked to the dressing-table, and unlocking a travelling-bag which lay there drew forth a small ivory miniature case. It contained the portrait of Kitty Lorton and a few withered blossoms—the souvenir of some bright, well-remembered hour gone by. For a moment he gazed at the withered dried-up leaves; then, with a sob that shook his whole frame, he bent over the fire and scattered them on the flames.

A tap at the door. Who could it be? It was a waiter with a letter. Guy took it, and a sharp pang seized him as he cast his eye on the writing. It was from Celia, his wife. He tore it open, and as he read it, each word that breathed the love so true and noble, of her he had well-nigh forgotten in his grief, sunk into his soul, stinging him with remorse, until his head dropped on his hands, and he groaned aloud in his anguish, “Another life wrecked. Another love wasted. Oh God, forgive me the wrong I have done.”

The meeting was arranged to take place at six o'clock on the following morning at the seat of Lord Wyldoates, a young English nobleman who, amongst other idiosyncrasies by which he became notorious, was in the habit of granting the use of his grounds for hostile meetings.

It was a cold, cheerless morning. Heavy, rolling, leaden-hued clouds obscured the sky, and a drizzling rain was falling. Guy and Bentham reached — in a fiacre, punctually at six, at the same moment as a well-appointed brougham, from which the Count, De Neuilly, and another Frenchman—who proved to be M. Granard, a military surgeon—alighted. The two parties saluted courteously, with the customary punctiliousness of men who are about to gratify a longing for each other's blood.

They were received at the lodge by a highly respectable looking personage attired in black, with a white cravat. This was Lord Wyldoates' steward, who at once led them to an open space smoothly turfed and surrounded by trees, which, he remarked, was a very favorite spot for these little affairs. He regretted that messieurs had such unfavorable weather.

While the preliminaries were being arranged by the seconds, Guy looked at his adversary. The Count was dressed all in black; a tightly-fitting frock coat buttoned high and a satin scarf completely hid his shirt-front, so that no conspicuous spot that might have served as a mark was to be seen. He was lounging carelessly on a rustic seat, calmly smoking a cigarette. Not a trace of agitation was in his manner or appearance, his face bore a look of ennui rather than of any other feeling. The conditions of the duel were soon arranged. De Neuilly, who had assisted at such meetings so often that he could scarcely feel interested in the proceedings, suggested that three shots should be allowed. To this Bentham objected. At last it was arranged that the combatants were to fire simultaneously, at fourteen paces, at the dropping of a handkerchief; a second shot to be allowed only if no blood were drawn in the exchange.

"Restez là, m'sieu, s'il vous plaît," and De Neuilly pointed to a spot which he had marked by a pebble. Guy took his position and Bentham gave him his pistol, which he took in his left hand. He was slightly pale, but it was not the pallor of fear; the calm expression of his face was that of a man who knew he was meeting death, and met it bravely. The seconds withdrew, the Count and Guy faced each other. How terribly short the space that divided them appeared! De Neuilly was about to give the signal, when a loud, excited shout stopped him. The next moment Bertie Deverell, breathless, and almost maddened with excitement, rushed up.

"What is this? Oh, God! what is this? Guy, Guy, what would you have done? Bentham, why don't you take him away? Would you help to murder him?" And he looked in a wild, frenzied manner from one to another.

The Count lifted his eyebrows, De Neuilly shrugged his shoulders, while Bentham, silenced by Bertie's anguish, stood looking at Guy.

"Are you all mad? this shall not go on, I say!" then turning to De Neuilly and the Count, "I tell you it would be mur-

der, cold-blooded murder! Oh God! Why doesn't some one speak! Guy, Guy, come away! you must, you shall!"

There was a dead silence for a moment. Then Guy spoke in a tremulous voice, "Bertie, you will make a child of me. It is a terrible trial for you, young one, but for my sake, face it bravely."

"Stand by calmly and see you slaughtered?"

"This *must* go on."

"It *shall* not! It was my quarrel, not yours! Even you would not murder a defenceless man, I presume?"—and he turned to the Count—"I tell you he cannot use his right arm. Let me take his place." His voice was hoarse with the passion that possessed him. He knew that a duel was inevitable, and in the madness of his despair thought only of saving Guy. "It was my quarrel! If you are not a coward you will fight me!" The Count smiled ironically.

"Another day, m'sieu—with pleasure: at present I am engaged with your brother."

"He shall not fight you. You think, scoundrel that you are—"

Guy advanced and laid his hand on Bertie. "Hush; nothing can stop this. I swear it."

A deep groan escaped Bertie: he knew then that further remonstrance was useless.

"Oh, Guy! oh, Guy!" and in an agony of grief he wrung his brother's hand.

"God bless you, Bertie. I am ready, m'sieu." And Guy resumed his position.

Bertie kept his eyes fixed on him, impelled by some irresistible fascination. De Neuilly held out a white handkerchief. "Etes vous prêt, messieurs?" A moment's pause, that seemed an age—the handkerchief fell, and simultaneously the report of two pistols sounded.

The Count was untouched, the shot had passed wide above him; but his fire, delivered with deadly aim, had reached its mark. On his back, motionless, lay Guy Lawrence on the

soddened grass, a small stream of blood welling from a wound in his right side. With a cry Bertie sprang forward, followed by the surgeon, and bent over him, one holding up his head, the other tearing open his clothes seeking for his wound.

"Is he killed?" moaned Bertie in a husky voice.

"Non—il vive encore."

Presently the wounded man's eyes opened slowly; then as they rested on Bertie he muttered with an effort, "Take me back—at once—no time."

Bertie looked at the doctor.

"Can he be moved?"

"Yees, yees, I tink so—de wound not seem vare bad."

At this moment the Count, carefully drawing on his gloves and smoking a freshly lit cigarette, sauntered up.

"Have I not killed him, Granard?" he asked, carelessly; "mon Dieu! I can't comprehend, I certainly intended to."

Bertie turned with a cry, and would have sprung at him but for Bentham, who restrained him. Then the Count, lifting his hat, without bestowing another look upon the havoc he had done, turned on his heel and left the ground with De Neuilly.

By this time the fiacre had been brought to the spot where Guy lay, and he was carefully lifted into it. He remained in a stupor from which they did not attempt to rouse him the whole of the way back to the hotel.

"Why did you not tell me of this, Bentham?" asked Bertie, reproachfully.

"Couldn't, you know: he made me promise not. How did you find it out?"

"By the merest accident. I had been somewhere with Leath and one or two other fellows—didn't get home till half-past five. Just before I reached the Grand I saw a fiacre drive away. Thinking it early for a departure I asked the porter who were in it. 'Messieurs Lawrence et Bentham,' said he. Lawrence and Bentham! I wondered what could take you both at such a time. Then suddenly the truth flashed upon me. I jumped into another fiacre and drove the way you had

gone, but we soon lost all trace of you. At last it occurred to me that the porter might have heard where you told the man to go. Cursing my stupidity in not thinking of that before, I drove back. 'Oh, yes, M. Lawrence had told him to go to —: it was not far, my man knew it.' Away I came as hard as the horse could gallop—oh, the agony of that drive! and reached you to see— Take care; rest his head on my shoulder. So; that's better."

In a few minutes they were at the Grand. Despatching one messenger for a well-known English surgeon resident in Paris, and another for a nurse, Bertie and Bentham themselves carried him carefully and noiselessly upstairs, and laying him on his bed, waited by his side, in terrible suspense and anxiety for the arrival of the doctor, whose verdict would be of life or of death for Guy Lawrence.

CHAPTER XXXVII.



AN hour later the English surgeon, one far-famed for his knowledge and skill, came softly out of the room where Guy Lawrence lay. Bertie followed him with ashen face and quivering lips, that would not frame the question he tried to ask.

"It's no use," said the doctor gravely and quietly, yet turning away his eyes as if he feared to see the suffering his words must cause. "There is internal bleeding. You can seek other advice if you please, but nothing can be done for him. It is all over with him, poor fellow."

"No use. Oh, God! then *I* have killed him. Doctor, try and save him; for the love of Heaven, try and save him."

"Hush!" said the other, quietly disengaging himself from Bertie's frantic grasp, and pointing to the door; "pray calm yourself; any excitement may hasten the end."

The end ! Had it come to that?—the end ? Had God sent this awful vengeance upon him ? Had this blackness of despair fallen upon him indeed ? Was there no ray of light—no hope of mercy ? Faint with horror Bertie leant against the wall, and the doctor stood apart, unwilling to leave him, yet powerless in the presence of a suffering that his skill could not alleviate.

As they stood so, both became conscious of a small white face with dilated eyes, gazing at them with speechless dread. Kitty Lorton, an earlier riser than any of the other visitors at the hotel, coming quietly down the stairs, had heard voices in the passage, and, waiting for the speakers to pass on, had overheard the last sentences.

The doctor rallied his thoughts ; he was struck by the terror in the girl's face, and began to fear some fresh scene. "Some relation," he thought ; "sister, perhaps." Then he said aloud, "My dear young lady, do not wait here. A gentleman has met with an accident, and—"

She shook him off, and turned to Bertie. "Bertie, who is it ?" she gasped. "Not—not—"

"Yes—Guy," answered Bertie, through his closed teeth, staring at her fiercely with haggard, bloodshot eyes : "he's dying—I've killed him. Go away—why do *you* come here ?"

But she did not hear him. She seemed for a moment absolutely numbed with horror. Her breath came quick and short. She tried to speak, but the words died on her parched, white lips. "Is he there ?" she said at last in a hoarse whisper, stretching out her hand towards the door. Bertie pushed her almost roughly aside.

"You can't go in. What do you want there ? He can't be disturbed. This is no place for you. Haven't you heard he's dying—*dying* !" he repeated, half mad with despair.

She seemed as if she would have made her way in, in spite of him. In this moment of overpowering emotion all minor thoughts, all worldly restraints, were utterly swept away. She

only knew that Guy was there—Guy was dying, and she must go to him; and when she found that she was stopped, she turned on Bertie with piteous pleadings.

"I must go to him; oh, Bertie, let me, let me: you cannot keep me from him. Oh! Bertie, he loved me, and I love him so. Let me go to him."

The words that she would have died rather than have uttered an hour ago came so naturally to her then. Bertie's face softened as they brought to his remembrance a confession that Guy had made to him long ago, and he spoke more quietly than he had done before.

"You must not go in; the doctor says that—Hush!"

The door of the room was opened very gently, and a woman in the dress of a *sœur de charité* beckoned to him, and laid her finger on her lips. Bertie, ghastly white, went hastily in, the doctor followed, and Kitty, utterly forgotten, crept tremblingly in behind them. The bright morning light streamed into the room, and fell on the bed, and on the man who lay there, wounded unto death.

Ay, death was coming—coming fast; he had set his seal on the drawn, sharpened features, had damped the crisp brow. hair with heavy dews, had robbed the powerful form of all its strength. Ay, death was coming even while they watched him, and the girl who loved him looked at him, and knew it. A sickening shiver, a deadly faintness, crept over her; but, with a terrible effort of will, she forced herself back to consciousness, and stood motionless in the shadow by the door. He turned his head as Bertie approached him, and his eyes, wide opened and fully conscious—those fearless, honest eyes that not even death could dim—rested with a wistful tenderness on his young brother, and he tried to stretch out one feeble hand towards him.

"Bertie, dear boy," he said, faintly, "stay with me now; don't leave me any more."

Bertie, shaking as in an ague, tried in vain to overcome his emotion. The sight of it seemed to distress Guy.

"Don't grieve, young one, don't grieve for me. It's—it's not so hard to die."

With one great, gasping sob, Bertie threw himself down by the bedside, and gave himself up to uncontrolled grief.

"Oh, Guy, you must not die—you cannot die! Oh, Guy, I have killed you! I have killed you—it was for me you went out. I am your murderer!"

Guy tried to raise himself—tried in vain to speak; but his dying lips refused to articulate, and he sank back with a low groan, insensible.

Paralyzed by the sight of what he had done, Bertie looked wildly round for help; but the doctor and nurse, obedient to a sign from the dying man, had left the room, and only Kitty stood there, hiding by the door. She never knew whether they had passed her unnoticed, or out of pity had let her stay; but there she remained, trembling and quivering in silent agony. As Guy fell back, she started forward with a low cry, and snatching up a glass that stood on a small table by his side, she raised his head and held it to his white lips. He did not move; he could not drink. Oh, God! was he dying even then? She bent her head and pressed her lips to his forehead. She called him by his name.

"Guy, Guy! dear Guy, hear me! Oh, God, make him hear me!"

As if her voice could recall him even from death, he opened his eyes and fixed them unconsciously on her.

"Try and drink, it will revive you—only one mouthful, Guy, dear Guy—"

Again her voice seemed to rouse him. The unconscious state changed to a petrified, awe-struck gaze. Did it seem to his wandering senses as if she in a vision had appeared to his dying eyes, watching over him? Obeying her, as by an instinct, he tried to swallow a few drops of the brandy, and it seemed instantly to revive him. As she put down the glass his eyes followed her, he looked at her and knew her—knew that it was no vision.

Such a strange, bright smile spread over his face—such a quiet, satisfied look of supreme happiness! For a moment love reigned triumphant over death, and chased away its ghastly horror.

"Kitty, dear Kitty," he said, in a whisper, such a feeble whisper—she bending her head close to his, could only catch the struggling, gasping words—"I'm so thankful you have come—I want to tell you—you will believe me now—I did love you, always."

She could not answer him. She could not speak and control her voice.

"It wasn't your fault," he said, with a faint, tender smile, "that you couldn't love me. You mustn't grieve yourself."

"Not love you—not love you? Oh, Guy, Guy! God knows I loved you with all my heart! God knows I would die for you now. Oh, Guy, my love, my love—take me with you!"

A look of unutterable joy spread over his face. He laid his hand on hers.

"Is it true? Oh, my darling, if it's true, kiss me once before I go."

She knelt by his side, and, putting her arms round him, pressed her warm, soft lips to his, cold and damp with the dews of death, in a long, lingering kiss, that seemed as if, by its passionate love, it would draw him back to life. She smoothed back the hair from his forehead; she caressed his drooping, nerveless hands; but he could not see her or heed her any more. He seemed to have sunk into a sort of heavy stupor; his eyes grew glazed and dim. Once he seemed to rouse himself, and she, laying her head close to his, tried to catch the feeble whisper.

"Hold—my—hand:—let—me—die—so."

And she, with his hand fast locked in hers, knelt by his side and watched. She knew that death must come soon. She never moved her eyes from his face; she heard people come into the room; she heard whispering voices by the door and

Bertie's despairing sobs, but she neither moved nor faltered. White, and cold, and motionless, she knelt and watched for death.

A stir, a whisper—"the change is coming." Yes. No need to tell her; she sees it, the strange gray pallor stealing over the drawn features. The sobs cease. Bertie staggers to his feet, and she, rising, puts her arm beneath the dying head, and holds him so, as if to aid the gasping struggle for the breath that will not come. Ay, the change is coming very, very fast; the terrible change from life to death. Once more the dim eyes open, the feeble hands grope blindly in the terrible, swift-coming darkness.

"Guy, my darling, my love, I am here, holding you. I am with you."

"Kitty!—forgive—all—Bertie—Bertie."

And so he died, with his brother's name on his lips—faithful even unto death.

Over the dead form of Guy Lawrence there was much bitter wailing—many agonized cries.

One woman, in the extremity of mortal grief, with frenzied ravings and passionate cries of terrible despair—with all the fury of a violent nature rebelling against a resistless fate—beat herself vainly and hopelessly against the rock which had wrecked her hopes; and in her madness seemed as if she would curse God and die. But on the other, the girl who had held him dying in her arms, there had fallen a great calm.

To her it seemed as if she had gained her lover rather than lost him. Only in that hour of death had she confessed her love and believed in his. Death could not rob her of him more than life had done. Living, he was another woman's husband; dead, he was hers, and hers alone.

The supreme joy of her life and the supreme agony had met in one hour, and passing over her, had left her in a trance-like stupor, in which death seemed a greater reality than life.

Thought of herself, sorrow for herself, intense grief—all

seemed hushed in the presence of the sublime tranquillity, the awful calm of death.

How she envied him—how she longed to share that unutterable peace, that perfect rest, which had shed an almost divine light on the white, still face! Would she break it if she could? If cries, and tears, and piteous pleadings, could bring him back to life, would she not smother them back into her own heart, rather than break the rest which had come to him after long suffering?

Truly, life had not been so sweet to Guy Lawrence that he had cared much to lose it: it had been to him one long struggle; an unending series of sacrifices to an idea of duty, which he had consummated by this last great sacrifice of all—his life. Mistaken he might have been; blind to the expediency which would have made other men consider whether it was wise or right to sacrifice himself and even others, in a desperate adherence to one duty, one vow.

Ay, mistaken he may have been, even as that Roman soldier, of old story, was mistaken, and would not see the expediency of flight even though the fire might consume him; unwise in the wisdom of this world, yet sublime in his heroism; and in his unselfish devotion, a man to be admired, not pitied.

There is a grave at Père-la-Chaise, a splendid marble monument, that bears Guy Lawrence's name, and the date of his death—erected by his widow and his only brother and heir.

For many months there were three constant visitors to that grave: two women, who brought delicate, costly flowers, and laid them lovingly on the white stone (and who always came at different times, and seemed to avoid each other); and the third, a young man, yet prematurely aged as by some terrible sorrow, who would sit for hours there in moody solitude. But little more than a year had passed when two of those mourners ceased to come, and only one remained constant in her visits to the dead. One restless, passionate heart,—which had been for a brief while filled with love,—when love and hope were dead,

turned again to ambition ; and in the glory of a triumphant début on an Italian stage, Estelle, the actress, tried to forget the sorrows of Celia, the widow. And Bertie Deverell, shunning old haunts and old associates, left Paris after a while, and, giving up all his old extravagant ways, never rested until he had rebuilt Erlesmere and restored it to more than its former beauty, as if he would thereby repair some at least of the wrong he had done ; and though after many years new faces came there, and children's voices echoed through the old gardens where he and Guy had played long ago, the shadow of a great sorrow never left Bertie Deverell's face—the remembrance of one who had given up all for him never left his heart.

Who shall say, seeing the altered life of the brother whom he loved so well, that Guy Lawrence's sacrifices were in vain ?

But one remained near to that foreign grave ; Kitty Lorton, unfettered by the necessity to earn her living, free from all fear of want—through a legacy left to her in Guy Lawrence's will—never went far from it, never discontinued her visits to it through the remainder of her life, though that life lasted many years, and seemed to her a long and weary waiting.

Time had robbed both face and form of all youthful beauty ; and the eyes that looked down on the cold marble were dim and heavy, the limbs that bore her day by day to his grave were weak and failing before death came and took her where her lover had gone before—took her to everlasting rest.

THE END.

1873.

1873.

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